Asset Management Level 2
Workshop 3
Communicating the Cost of Services

Participant Workbook

This initiative is offered through the Municipal Asset Management Program, which is delivered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and funded by the Government of Canada.

fcm.ca/assetmanagementprogram

About FCM

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) is the national voice of municipal government. In leading the municipal movement, FCM works to align federal and local priorities, recognizing that strong hometowns make for a strong Canada.

About AUMA

Founded in 1905, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) represents 269 urban municipalities including cities, towns, villages, summer villages, and specialized municipalities. AUMA works with federal and provincial governments and business and community stakeholders on a broad range of issues to strengthen the economic, social, cultural, and environmental vitality of its member municipalities.

About RMA

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) is an independent association representing Alberta's 63 counties and municipal districts, five specialized municipalities, and the Special Areas Board. Since 1909, the RMA has helped rural municipalities achieve strong, effective local government.

About IAMA

Infrastructure Asset Management Alberta (IAMA) represents the greater community of any person, organization or agency engaged in or has an interest in infrastructure asset management.

The 'community' is supported by the IAMA Working Group which is a voluntary group of representatives from associations, local governments, agencies, private industry and/or first nations brought together to recognize and integrate the administrative, technical, operational, financial, and planning aspects of asset management.

Table of Contents

Welcome

Welcome to Workshop 3 – Communicating the Cost of Services! Today we will be covering the following:

Module 1: Introducing the idea of civic literacy and the relationship to service delivery

    Learning Goal 1: Understand the importance of civic literacy in your community

    Learning Goal 2: The connection between civic literacy and municipal revenue

    Learning Goal 3: Identify how public participation is a key component of civic literacy

    Learning Goal 4: Identify the benefits of communicating about services

Module 2: Developing a communications plan, tools, and materials to support the cost of service discussion

    Learning Goal 5: Understand the differences between communication and engagement

    Learning Goal 6: Understand communication tactics for target audiences

    Learning Goal 7: Learn how to develop a communications plan to communicate cost of services

Module 3: Leading the discussion about the cost of services

    Learning Goal 8: Understand how to implement and adapt your communications plan

Using the Workbook

The following icons will help you to navigate the workbook and presentation and workbook.

Learning Goal

Specific learning outcome to be achieved.

Try it out

Actions, questions, or perspectives to put into practice back at work.

Activity

Individual or group exercises designed to put learning into practice.

Resources

Additional reference materials and tools related to the topic. Web addresses for the resources can be found at the back of the workbook.

Glossary

Definitions of words and phrases used in the course material.

Reflection

A place to write your own reflections and insights on how you might apply a concept or idea to your own municipal circumstances.

Did You Know?

Interesting facts and insights on asset management.

Module 1 – Understanding and Articulating the Cost of Service Delivery

LEARNING GOAL 1: Understand the cost of service delivery in your community's language

Today, local governments have a greater role to play in service delivery than at any other time. Yet, despite growing responsibilities, public expectations of local government as problem solvers have become more and more unrealistic. This is not a negative reflection of government services or on the people serving in government. **Rather, it's a growing public awareness that the incremental changes of local government have not kept up with the increasing complexity of community challenges**[1].

What do trade-offs mean to the public?

We have spent a lot of time talking about the trade-offs between service, risk, and cost in the context of municipal administration and Council. But what do these mean from the public's perspective?

Often, constituents see the impacts of a local government's trade-off decisions in their interactions with a service. Even if the change was accompanied by public engagement and communication, the actual impacts of the decision won't be felt until after the change has been implemented. Therefore, it's essential to consider the level of service at the customer's level throughout the decision-making process.

It's also important to communicate that changes made to levels of service may also impact the future capital budget and operation budget for other services that are directly/indirectly tied to the service under review For example, choosing to build and operate a new recreation facility might squeeze resources for road maintenance while also increasing the level of road maintenance required where the facility is being built.

Consider: How does the public react to trade-offs in your community? Do you think they are aware of what those trade-offs are?

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[1]   *Urban Systems. (2020). Discussion Paper: Emerging Stronger Together as a Community.*

Activity

As a group, discuss your experiences in communicating level of service changes to your community members.

1. How was the communication received? Positively or negatively?

2. Why do you think it was received this way? What did you learn from this experience?

What is Civic Literacy?

Civic literacy is having the knowledge and skills needed to participate in making meaningful change in your community. It applies to people across the community, including those elected and appointed to run a municipality[2]

Often, people in a community may be invited to talk about a project they know nothing about, at a time that isn't convenient for them (like a Sunday afternoon or weekday evenings), and in a format they don't understand—this can put them in a bad headspace before you even get to the discussion.

What are some assumptions we have made about our community members and civic literacy?

When people show up to complain, they're labeled as unreasonable or a "NIMBY" and when they don't show up, they're labeled as apathetic.

NIMBY = Not In My Backyard

There are lots of different versions of this term, but generally its used to describe community members who oppose development near their home because of a perceived personal threat. There are lots of reasons someone may oppose development near them, but it often stems from uncertainty or a lack of clarity around the project and the impacts they might experience.

2   *Urban Systems. (2020). Discussion Paper: Emerging Stronger Together as a Community.*

Asset Management Level 3.0 - Communicating the Cost of Services

Both assumptions can be wrong!

This cycle is problematic and has contributed to decreased public trust and a growing perspective of an ineffective and inefficient government.

Further, some citizens have morphed into simply "taxpayers" with an increasing sense of entitlement that prefer blaming local government rather than taking responsibility for building and strengthening their community[3].

Civic literacy is important for building a more trusting relationship between a government and its constituents and enabling public engagement and communication that is productive and meaningful rather than just an item on a to-do list. It is the foundation for people in a community to be able to take an active role in talking about the levels of service they want and need.

What does it mean to improve civic literacy? Why is this important?

Improving civic literacy across the community can increase understanding of the interrelationships that represent the complexity local governments face. Moving beyond a business-as-usual approach requires finding a common language that can be used to frame discussions, inform decisions, and prioritize investments more effectively[4]. This is where asset management comes in!

Consider: How would you rate the level of civic literacy in your community around:

- Tax rates
- User fees
- Spending on road/bridge maintenance
- Spending on water systems
- Spending on parks and recreation infrastructure
- Spending on Transportation/Recreation (user fee specific)

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3   *Ibid.*
4   *Ibid.*

How can we Improve civic literacy?

As with everything, there is no single answer to "how" to change the community. The inability to provide a single answer shows that we can't change people—only how they interact. It's important to remember that no matter how much information you share, some people may still disagree—and that's okay. You're not always trying to obtain buy-in or consensus, in some cases you're just providing the necessary information.

Thinking about improving civic literacy through this lens requires incorporating the following aspects into community processes:

Empowering people to meaningfully engage

This cannot simply be a scenario where the public is either informed or they aren't. What role can the community play in empowering people to be more informed in how they participate in decisions that affect them.

Acknowledge the systemic nature of the community

Everything is connected, and we all contribute to the state of our communities. Taking a systems approach to the community reinforces the need for a broader understanding of the interdependencies that exist among our built, social, economic, and natural assets.

Planning is not a linear path

Planning is important, but plans do not predict the future. Context changes and the ability to adapt is critical in the face of change, requiring a commitment to consistently evaluate implementation efforts.

Changes in community processes are hard

We need the courage to embrace changes from the status quo, no matter how incremental these steps may be, with the understanding that these steps may fail[5].

Why is improving civic literacy important for the level of service discussion?

For the public, they can benefit from understanding limitations around what their municipality can and can't do with their tax dollars and user fees. It may also help to increase their sense of responsibility for the services they use and understand how services are impacted. This understanding also makes it easier to explain when change is necessary. Gathering meaningful public input is also an important data source when setting service levels. Effective engagement is a two-way street!

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5   *Urban Systems. (2020). Discussion Paper: Emerging Stronger Together as a Community.*

LEARNING GOAL 2: The Connection Between Civic Literacy and Municipal Revenue

In asset management, understanding cost includes knowing where the money comes from, as well as where it gets spent. When you talk to the public about service levels, helping them understand municipal revenue is an important piece of the puzzle.
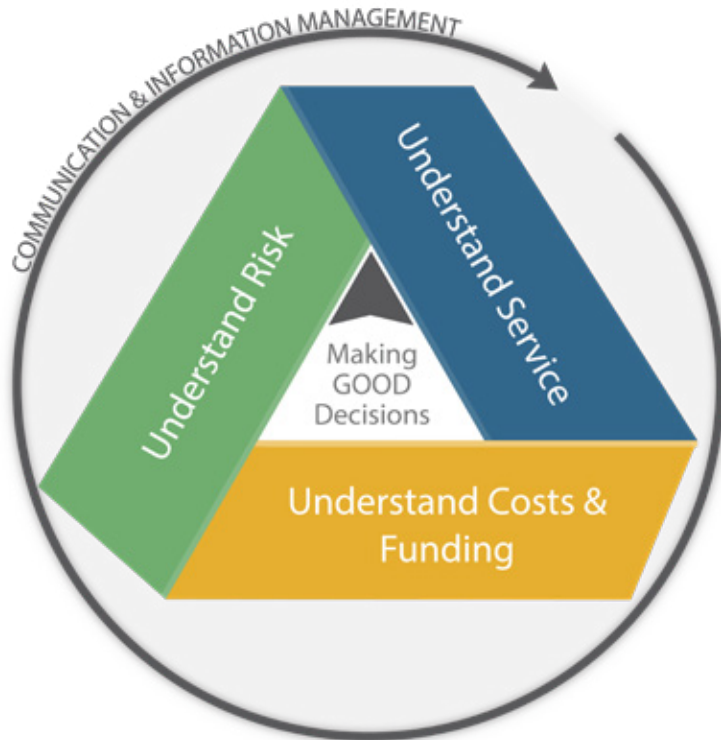
Alberta Handbook & Toolkit

The mechanics of municipal revenues

What tools are available for municipal revenue generation, and how do we communicate this to the community in relation to levels of service? How do we bridge the gap between what residents pay and how they see their dollars being put to work?

The three main sources of municipal revenue[6]:

REVENUE SOURCE	USED FOR	PROS	CONS
Property Taxes	Capital costs, O&M	• Relatively transparent source of revenue – residents can find out how their tax dollars are used regarding level of service	• Public misconceptions about how municipalities set tax rates • Tax tolerance can vary - often a political issue that can be hard to talk about in a productive way • May be difficult to explain priorities regarding infrastructure due to lack of public understanding of infrastructure life cycles, O&M costs, etc.
User Fees	Covering costs of a service	• High transparency - more direct link between user and service • Community members may have greater understanding of the 'why' to pay	• Rising O&M costs may require higher fees – tolerance for this can be low • May not always cover the cost of providing a service – how do you talk about this with the community?
Municipal Grants (transfers)	Specific projects, specific capital investment, specific O&M costs	• Reduces financial strain on community • Community members may perceive as saving them money	• Often only available for capital projects, O&M still needs to be paid for – how can this be clarified for community members? • If paying for O&M, transfers might only cover part of the cost – how do we communicate this to community members? • Grants may not be reliable long-term sources, putting the financial resilience of the municipality at risk. Can be difficult to communicate larger, more sudden changes to revenues.

6   CUPE. (2014). Municipal Finances 101. Municipal finances 101 | Canadian Union of Public Employees (cupe.ca)

Activity

In breakout rooms, discuss whether you think your community members understand the following:

1. Direct fee for service vs. general revenue approaches to funding services in your community:

2. What their property taxes pay for and how property taxes factor into maintaining levels of service:

3. What are some assumptions community members may have regarding municipal revenues?

4. How are you currently communicating about municipal revenues to your community members?

Consider:

1. What are some assumptions community members may have regarding municipal revenues?

2. How are you currently communicating about municipal revenues to your community members?

3. Is it working? Why or why not?

Activity

In breakout rooms, review the information you collected on O&M costs for the service you selected.

1. If there is a difference between the actual cost of service delivery and your revenues, is it important to communicate this with the public? Why or why not?

2. What are the key pieces of information about the cost of services to communicate to the public?

LEARNING GOAL 3: Identify How Public Participation is a Key Component of Civic Literacy

In this section we'll be going through how the public understands their role in service delivery and exploring how your public participation policy might support communicating about service delivery in your community.

Some connections are easier than others to understand. For example, when you pay for a gym membership, you can immediately experience the benefit of this cost . However, services like roads, water and wastewater are less direct and there may be a disconnect between how much an individual household pays and the level of service they get for their money.

How does the public understand their role in service delivery?

Explicitly: *They know they pay user fees, provide feedback during public engagement, and vote for candidates during elections.*

Implicitly: *They turn on the tap and receive clean, safe drinking water, drive on paved roads with underground utilities beneath, and enjoy public park spaces.*

Civic literacy and public participation are tools that can help bridge this gap in understanding.

Public Participation, as per the MGA

The legal requirement of municipalities to communicate with its public is outlined in Section 216.1 of the Municipal Government Act. Public Participation Policies must be publicly available and must identify how municipalities will approach public participation and engagement. The Public Participation Policy must also identify the types or categories of approaches the municipality will use to engage municipal stakeholders, and the types or categories of circumstances in which the municipality will engage municipal stakeholders.

How does your public participation policy support communication about services in your community?

Your public participation policy is a good starting point for developing communication about service delivery. It's helpful to see what other communities are doing, keeping in mind varying community perspectives and willingness to pay. Generally, Council and public opinion will shape the discussion that takes place.

Case Studies: What's going on in other communities?

Gathering feedback on services in Calgary, AB – The city conducts the annual _Citizen Satisfaction Survey_ to gather people's views and perceptions about programs and services. The findings inform a performance-based report for Council, administration, and the public. Gathering this type of information on a regular basis can help inform asset management strategy, determine the public's willingness to pay and create ongoing two-way communication.

Guiding the budget discussion in Yellowknife, NWT - The city created simple and engaging public-facing infographics to communicate "_Where your money goes_" in their annual budget and "_Where the money comes from_". Material like this can be used for many different purposes and across many different mediums – such as social media, mail-outs and as posters. It also ensures the Municipality is influencing the discussion about infrastructure spending and providing avenues for increasing public literacy on levels of service.

Discussing water and sewer rate hikes in Winnipeg, MB - To help pay for $1.8billion treatment plant upgrades, _the city recommended a combined increase of 11.6% to water and sewer rates for four years_. It's possible that the rates will rise higher if other levels of government do not provide part of the funding for the upgrades. Currently, the city takes 11% of total revenue from sewer and water rates as a dividend—but one councillor doesn't support this, he argues the city doesn't direct this cash for upgrades to its sewage infrastructure. Another councillor says rate increases are really taxes disguised as fees.

LEARNING GOAL 4: Identify the Benefits of Communicating About Services

There's a lot of value to in communicating about services—both for the public and local government.

What are the benefits of engaging and communicating with the public about services[7]?

- Clearer identification of the values, ideas and recommendations of community members

- More informed residents, greater feelings of ownership over service delivery

- Improved decision-making and actions, with better impacts and outcomes

- More community buy-in

- Improved civil discussions and civic literacy

- More trust - in other community members and in local government agencies and decision makers

- Higher rates of community participation in projects and initiatives

- Leadership development among community members

Consider: How would these outcomes affect your work in your community around asset management?

Engaging with the public about levels of service will require some background information. The work you have completed in the previous workshops has helped you to collect what you know about services in one place. This will help you identify the key messages to tell the public and the areas where you need some input from the public to support Council in making good trade-off decisions.

Let's look at an example! The facilitators will share the example roads level of service template.

When level of service changes

It's important to provide information about changes to services that impact people, ideally before these changes happen so they can be prepared. If you have already communicated the problem statement behind why a service level may be changing, the conversation about what specific changes are happening becomes less complex. Giving the public a heads up also helps to build trust and can help them adjust their schedules if needed so they can manage the change.

Module 2 – Developing a Communications Plan, Tools, and Materials to Support the Cost of Service Discussion

LEARNING GOAL 5: Understand the Differences Between Communication and Engagement

The term "engagement" is often used by municipalities to describe any formal contact with the public. There are differences between communication and engagement and a time and place for each approach.

There are also different levels of engagement! In this section we will talk about how to communicate with the public about service levels, engage the public specifically in levels of service discussions, and which levels of engagement are most appropriate.

Communication vs. Engagement

Communication and engagement are different practices. Both play a role in interacting with community members and there are situations that call for each approach.

Communication is the approach taken to share information, In a municipal context, communications is the appropriate approach to conveying relevant information about:

- Projects and associated decision(s)
- Your organization's approach to engagement and the public's opportunities to participate in engagement activities
- Input collected through the public engagement activities (what was heard)
- Decisions that were made and how public engagement played a role in the decision-making process.

When to Communicate[8]

It is best to communicate to the public when:

- Immediate response is required (e.g. Emergency)
- A person in a position of authority is acting within their authority (e.g. police)
- Routine operations are occurring (e.g. mowing grass after a heavy rain)
- Decisions are made to meet legal requirements (e.g. improvements to water treatment plant)

The decisions effect only on those who have already agreed to be affected through some form of contract (e.g. employment, volunteerism, accepting elected office" [9])

Engagement is the process of involving community in decision making and providing opportunities for stakeholder input. Engagement is the approach taken to:

- Purposefully involving community members in municipal decision making.

- Satisfy requirements where public engagement is part of the information required to make informed decisions about public programs, initiatives, and levels of service.

When to Engage[10]

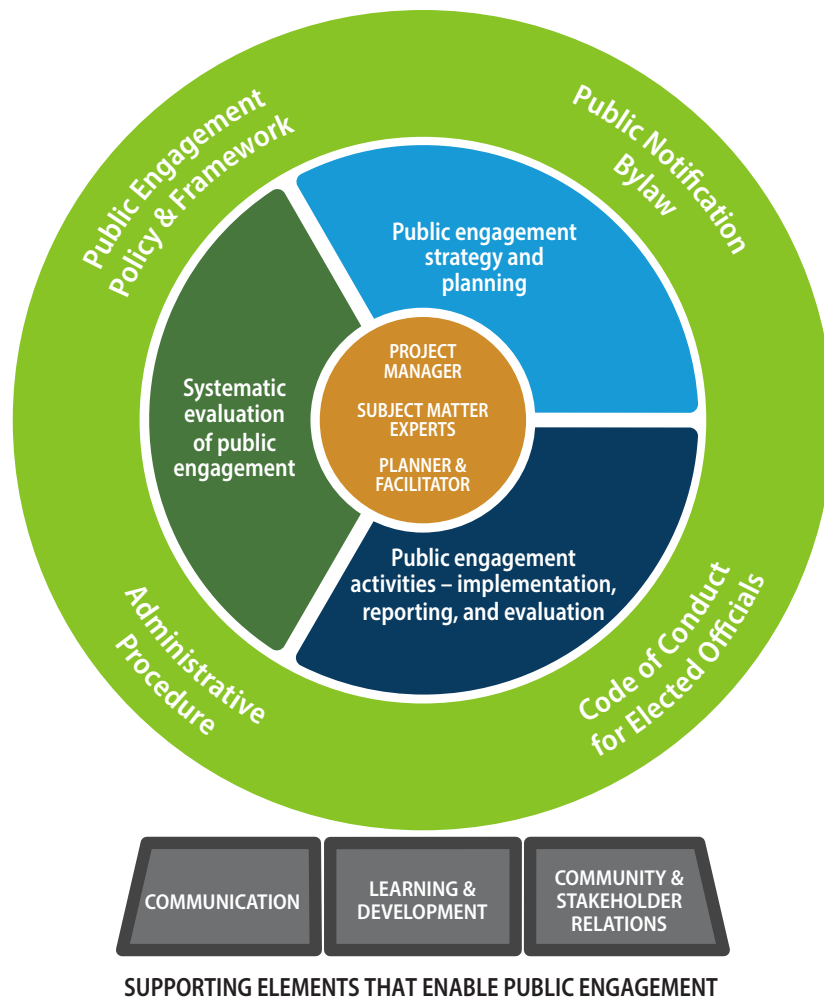A formal public engagement process should be undertaken when:

- Public notification and input are required by law

- The decision is in response to a known concern or community expectations (e.g. a proposed casino, recreation centre)

- The decision affects the comfort or routine of citizens (e.g. extended road closures)

- There are perceived risks associated with the decision (e.g. brewery development)

- Council or administration requests public input prior to making the decision (e.g. public buildings or open space management"[11])

How do we communicate with the public about asset management?

Most of the public is probably not interested in the details of your municipality's approach to asset management. People will connect more directly with conversation about services that are important in their every day. Want to tell people about the water pipe replacements that are planned for their neighbourhood? Talk about how aging water pipes put their ability to turn on the tap and receive clean water whenever they want at risk. Want to tell people about proposed reductions to your pothole filling program? Tell them about how much of their tax dollars are currently spent on filling potholes and why reductions are necessary.

10, 11   *AMA Public Input toolkit, accessed from: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/5266e3ea-55a4-4856-be8b-8924dc48cdd1/ resource/8aa5677f-b315-4a8a-8457-c4da3d6a3d94/download/ama-public-input-toolkit-sept2014.pdf*

Public Engagement Policy & Framework

Public Notification Bylaw

Public engagement strategy and planning

PROJECT MANAGER

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

PLANNER & FACILITATOR

Systematic evaluation of public engagement

Public engagement activities – implementation, reporting, and evaluation

Administrative Procedure

Code of Conduct for Elected Officials

| COMMUNICATION | LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT | COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS |

SUPPORTING ELEMENTS THAT ENABLE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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Public engagement is not a single document or approach. It's a system that serves to provide opportunities to better understand the values and priorities in your community. This section provides on overviews of some of the components of your public engagement system.

Public Engagement Policy and Framework: directs the purpose and application of public engagement within a municipality and describes when and how it will add value. A framework describes the structures and key elements that underlie a municipality's preferred approach to public engagement.

Public Notification Bylaw: describes how a municipality will give official notice when it advertises a bylaw, resolution, meeting, public hearing, or other municipal business. In addition to newspaper advertising, mail, or delivery to residences, the bylaw may now include electronic advertising.

Code of Conduct for Elected Officials: describes how municipal Councillors' conduct is governed and outlines a municipality's complaint system.

Administrative Procedure: provides an objective set of rules to govern municipal administration's approach to public engagement.

There are many ways to engage with your community. Different scenarios and decisions call for different engagement tools and tactics. Choosing the ways to engage or communicate with your community members can be done using your municipality's guiding documents and policies.

Increasing public engagement and increasing influence in the decision-making process →

Type of Decision	Consultative	Deliberative	Participatory	Citizen-led
Level of Engagement	Consultation (Including visioning, ideation, and refining ideas)	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Explanation	The municipality makes the decision. It invites people to share ideas and input or, if a concept is already developed, provide feedback to help improve or refine it.	The municipality makes the decision. However, it wants the public's help in assessing and understanding the possibilities as well as the impact and possible trade-offs associated with the possibilities.	The municipality makes the decision. However, the municipality and the public take a shared or joint approach to coming up with, assessing, and prioritizing possibilities. The municipality is committed to working through various scenarios to understand the preferred solution(s).	The municipality authorizes its citizens to make the decision. The citizens lead the consultation, involvement, and/or collaboration, make a decision, and report its decision back to the municipality.

Municipalities typically **inform** or **communicate** service decisions to the public. They also consult the public to better understand community priorities which informs the services and service levels provided. Consultation can help with understanding the willingness to pay for services or willingness to accept decreased levels of service.

Consider your audience: Who needs to be engaged or communicated with and what are the best ways to engage or communicate with that group ?

Activity

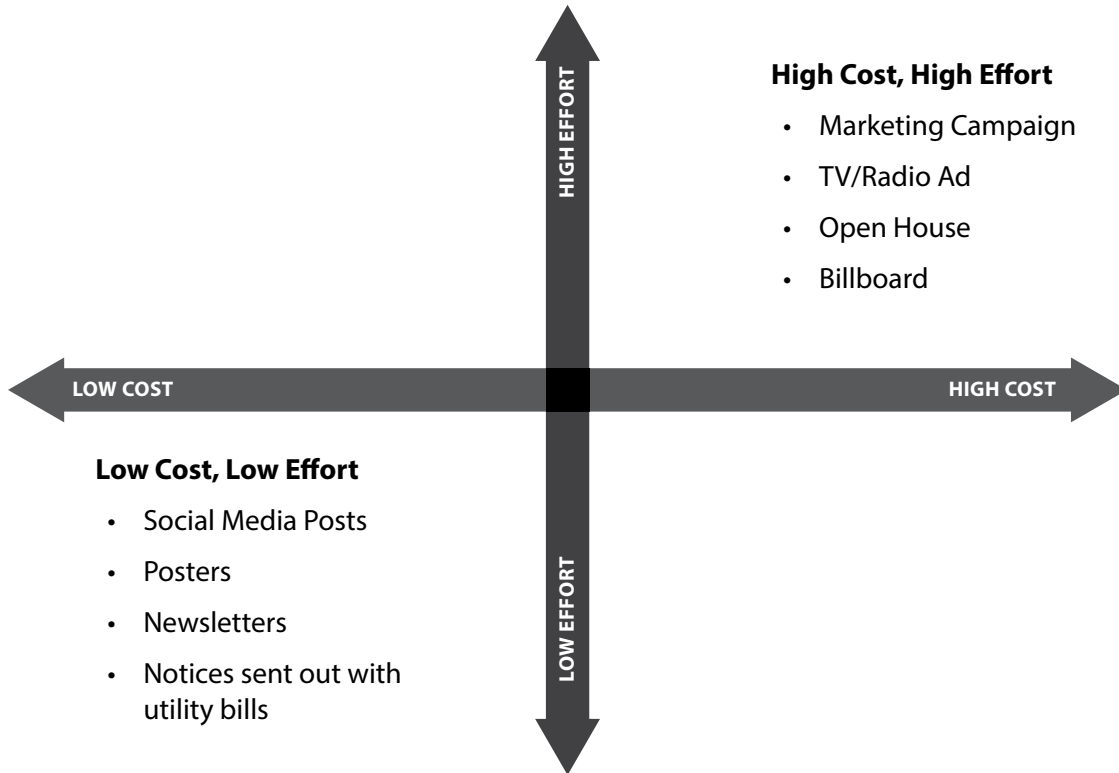With your Asset Management team, think about the service users you identified in the first workshop.

1. What tools are you currently using to communicate or engage with them about your selected service?

2. How often do you communicate or engage about the service?

LEARNING GOAL 6: Understand Communication Tactics for Target Audiences

Good communication can create a culture of transparency and trust amongst stakeholders and citizens which in turn can increase community engagement in decision making and improve civic literacy. Good asset management relies on communicating and engaging with community members in discussions about what is important to them in levels of service.

The Range of Tactics

HIGH EFFORT

LOW COST ← → **HIGH COST**

LOW EFFORT

High Cost, High Effort

- Marketing Campaign
- TV/Radio Ad
- Open House
- Billboard

Low Cost, Low Effort

- Social Media Posts
- Posters
- Newsletters
- Notices sent out with utility bills

Identifying realistic tactics for your community:

- What are you already doing?
- What makes an impact with the public?
- What can you afford?
- What does your organization have capacity for?
- Where does your audience already get their information from?

Below are some practices for effective communication and engagement. These practices can be used both in targeted engagement events, as well as in general communications. Some can even be used in informal conversations.

- **Keep it interesting** – relate communication to things people care about – their experience with services, having their voice heard, and minimizing taxes and fees

- **Tell a story** – connect asset management and service delivery to broader community goals.

- **Brand it** – branding helps make the message identifiable

- **Leverage current events** – connect asset management to local and national news and how asset management plays a role in supporting the community's long-term goals

- **Find ambassadors** – special interest groups, community leaders, or others who are passionate about preserving the community. These people are credible and who can help you spread the message.

- **Collaborate** – Work with other municipalities, provincial associations and communities of practice, or other levels of government to develop broad communication campaigns to convey important concepts or information. These may apply at a regional or even provincial level. Several municipalities have experience or have developed tools for communication related to asset management, find out what is available for you to leverage.

Some Examples of Communications Tactics and Content

- *District of Saanich Municipal Budgeting 101* – This is a presentation that communicates how Saanich approaches financial planning to balance the budget. This presentation provides a description of the level of services required to meet the expectations of the community balanced against taxation and user fee levels.

- *Cochrane Budget Infographics & other material* – These materials are a good example of communicating municipal spending in a one-page, visual format. These infographics could be used as ads on social media, print, or mailed out with tax assessments.

- *City of Winnipeg Budget Engagement Report (2019)* – This is a detailed summary of the tactics the City of Winnipeg used to engage the public on budget planning. This report contains some interesting approaches to how information is structured and delivered, as well as survey, social media, pop-up events and other tactics. This is a comprehensive resource that may not be read by the public, but probably has some useful suggestions for your asset management team!

- *Participatory Asset Mapping* – Often, building civic literacy about services starts with communicating the scale and impact of infrastructure in a community. This resource provides a toolkit for involving the public in a mapping exercise that visually shows where the assets are in their community.

Activity

As an asset management team, list all your current tactics for communicating or engaging the public. Rank them in order from most effective to least effective.

Tactic	Communication or Enagagement	Rank (Least effective to most effective)

1. Where do you see opportunity to integrate conversation about the cost and level of services with your municipality's current tactics?

2. What have you learned from the least effective tactics that can help you incorporate the cost and levels of service discussion into the most effective tactics?

LEARNING GOAL 7: Learn How to Develop a Communications Plan to Communicate Cost of Services

Purpose of a Communications Plan

All communication and engagement activities should align with guiding principles of public participation within your public participation policy.

When referring to cost of service or levels of service, you're likely looking to communicate or inform community members about current levels of service and costs to perform.

Communications plans can also help to:

- *Partner with the public:* Your communication and engagement work should support residents in understanding the role they play in general engagement and feedback processes and your communications plan should increase civic literacy within your community.

- *Provide municipal staff with a flexible process:* Your communication and engagement efforts may not go as planned. Developing a plan with clear measures of success and a way to evaluate progress will support staff in adapting the plan as you learn more through doing.

- *Provide accountability and transparency:* Your communication and engagement tactics should be transparent. The communication and engagement process should be made clear so that stakeholders who contribute to engagement in their community understand where their feedback is going and what next steps are.

Components of a Communications Plan:

A communications plan could include a combination of the following topics:

1. **Background**

   - Community information
   - Relevant information about issues communicated in the communications plan
   - References to relevant policiesies or practices in other departments

2. **Purpose/Communication Objectives**

   - What are you communicating about?
   - Why are you communicating about this issue?
   - Are there guiding principles you will refer to?
   - What are your communication objectives?

3. **Stakeholders & Audiences**

   - Analysis of internal and external audiences/stakeholders and communication objectives for each

4. **Key Messages**

   - Identification of message themes

   - Provide project framing language that is consistent, ongoing, and tailored

   - Create specific, detailed messaging tailored to the identified stakeholders and audiences

   - Include proactive and reactive messaging (how will you notify about anticipated change in service versus responding to complaints) - who will be responding?

5. **Communication Tactics**

   - Specifics of tools used (i.e. email blast, website, twitter posts, signage, open house, etc.), what the purpose is, audience, roles and responsibilities and timeline.

   - If your plan has specific objectives, can also think through which objective/s each tactic is for.

6. **Schedule/Timeline**

7. **Measures of Success**

   - Monitoring and measuring for each tactic/media

   - Evaluation frameworks

Some options for additional sections that may be helpful:

8. **Issues Analysis**

   - Identification of barriers and benefits around the issue

9. **Media Relations**

   - How will you communicate with the media regarding this project/initiative?

   - Identification of spokesperson(s) or media contact(s)

10. **Complaint & Issues Management[12]**

   - Detailed process for receiving and responding to complaints/concerns from public.

   - Who in your municipality will be responding to complaints and concern?

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12   *2021-01-12 - Okotoks Engagement Strategy Report -2.pdf (urban-systems.com)*

Activity

With your AM Team, have a look through the Communications plan template. Identify which sections would be most helpful to you in developing a plan to communicate about the levels and costs of your selected service(s).

ONGOING COMMUNICATIONS AS CONTEXT EVOLVES

Things don't always go to plan! Imagine you are planning to communicate level of service changes to your outdoor pool by hosting a public open house. As the open house gets going, it becomes clear that residents were expecting to hear about new additions or upgrades rather than the proposed decrease in operating hours. Your municipality currently has no plans to do any additions or upgrades to the pool. What would your next step be?

a. Tell residents that the purpose of this engagement is to talk about the proposed changes to hours and continue with the plan.

b. Using sticky notes and a flip chart, add a space to your setup to collect feedback about what residents would like to see for additions or upgrades to the pool.

c. Use the situation as an opportunity to educate residents about what it currently costs to operate and maintain the pool that you already have and start the conversation about what residents would be willing to pay for additions or upgrades.

d. Communicate to residents that you will be taking their feedback into consideration, will be developing some informational materials about the current operations and state of the pool, and will be coming back to talk to them again once they have more information to consider.

Just like asset management, communicating with the public is an ongoing effort. You will never be "done"!

Module 3 – Leading the Discussion About the Cost of Services

LEARNING GOAL 8: Understand How to Implement and Adapt Your Communications plan

Implementing your communications plan

Just having a plan written down isn't going to advance you in communicating and engaging with the public – it needs to be implemented! As you do so, there are some best practices that you should consider:

- Evaluate your tactics, key messages, and audiences on a regular basis.
    - Building evaluation into your communication process is a good approach – how often will you check your social media stats? Which key messages performed better or worse than others? Is there a group of people who haven't responded to your communication and engagement? The clearer your evaluation methods are, the easier it will be to adjust and adapt your communication as needed.
- Use opportunities for feedback from the public to see what's working and how it's being perceived.
    - Communication is a two-way street. Incorporating opportunities for feedback into your communication methods is an important form of measurement and can help you adapt your plan if something's not working. Designing tactics with feedback loops is critical for helping the community understand how their input informs decisions about service changes and levels of service.
- Granularity in your tactics table will make them easier to implement.
    - Vague, high-level tactics leave space for confusion and ambiguity. The more specific and granular your tactics can be, the easier they will be to implement and pass on responsibility to other team members. Each tactic and its delivery should be tailored to meet the needs of your target audience and should have proposed timing.

Activity

Consider the following scenario:

You have completed a cost of water analysis for your community and have learned that your current water rates and rate structure do not recoup costs to the level that Council has decided is appropriate. The water rates have been the same for the past 15 years. Council has provided direction that the level of service should remain the same and has tasked you with determining what an appropriate rate and rate structure should be. You have talked to your neighbouring municipalities and their rates are about what yours currently are, and they have no intention of raising rates.

According to your cost of water analysis, to fully recover costs ratepayers should be paying a variable rate that is almost double what they are currently paying.

1. Considering what we've discussed today about communication and engagement, what would your first step be in starting this conversation with the public? What are you hoping to achieve with this first step?

2. What would your second step be? How will you know it's time to move from the first step to the second?

Some suggestions: if you haven't already, start with some education about water and the service delivered by the municipality. Consider including this information in your monthly water bills.

Adapting your Communications Plan

Chances are that your communication and engagement activities may not go according to plan. What do you do when you get results that you didn't anticipate?

- **Take a deep breath!** Even if the results are not favourable, you've made progress in involving the public in discussions about services, which is an accomplishment in itself. The first step is often the hardest.

- **Be adaptive.** Do not give up on your efforts simply because they failed. You can adjust your plan based on what you heard and learned from your previous step. Evaluate your key messages and tactics so you can go back and examine what's working and what isn't and adjust where needed. It may even be beneficial to develop tactics that can be adjusted 'on-the-go' to meet emerging needs and concerns of your community members. In many cases, listening to the public's feedback, adjusting course, and sharing how you adapted the plan based on their feedback results in building trust with people.

- **Take some time to think, regroup, and consult with your team.** Revisit your goals for communication and engagement and brainstorm how to adjust the plan to achieve those goals based on what you now know.

- **Communicate how your plan is changing.** Public suspicion or lack of trust in the engagement process can be minimized by communicating how you've listened and are adjusting your plan. Transparency can build trust

You've Made It!

You have dedicated 4 days of group learning time, as well as time in between for check ins and homework

Topics covered in this course:

- Understanding the history of service delivery
- Define level of service
- Define assets required to deliver services
- Define primary customer groups
- Barriers to implementing asset management and strategies for change
- Detailed County of Forty Mile case study
- Understanding and articulating the cost of service delivery
- Connecting level of service to risk
- Introducing the idea of civic literacy and the relationship to service delivery
- Developing a communications plan, tools, and materials to support the cost of service discussion
- Leading the discussion about the cost of services

Looking Forward…

- Develop your communication and engagement plan for involving the public in discussions about your selected service(s)
- Communicate the results of your level of service and cost assessment to Council, and share your proposed communication and engagement plan
- Implement your communication and engagement plan
- Consider expanding your level of service definitions and cost assessments to other services

Check-in on Asset Management Progress

A requirement of this course is to complete a self-assessment on the FCM Asset Management Readiness Scale at the conclusion of the program. You will have time during the workshop to complete this – refer to the links to the FCM Asset Management Readiness Scale below.

https://fcm.ca/en/resources/mamp/tool-asset-management-readiness-scale