

Best Practices: Sharing Environmental Health Research

“There needs to be more dialogue between researchers and decision-makers to understand each other regarding environmental justice issues.”

– Activist

Results from environmental health research can inform efforts to prevent and solve environmental health challenges. This document synthesizes existing science communication literature with insight from decision maker interviews to offer guidelines for translating and sharing environmental health research. We learned that decision makers including activists, community-based organization leaders, government and elected officials and their staff want more opportunities to engage with researchers.



The best practices include remarks from key informants who helped develop them.

Align Your Research with Constituent Concerns

Learn about your audience. Consider how your research aligns with the environmental health concerns of their constituents.

“Think about what the information can do for the person you’re speaking to. A policy maker has different information needs than a community member. There is a not one-size fits all approach.”

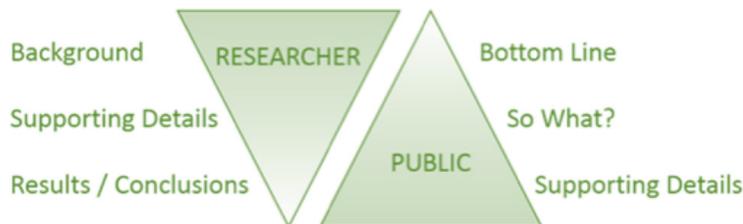
– Decision Leader

Present Research Conclusions First

Lead with the most salient information. Typically delivered at the end of a scientific presentation, the [Public Communication Model](#) below suggests beginning with the bottom line when communicating with non-research audiences. Starting with research conclusions is a key strategy for delivering scientific evidence.

“Less is more, give me the compelling information up front.”

– Legislative Liaison



“I’ve been in the office of a legislator and had thirty seconds to talk before a loud buzzer sounded. The legislator stood up and walked out to go vote. You really have to think about what you want to say in those thirty seconds.”

– CBO Leader

Recognize Knowledge Differences

Part of getting to know your audience is understanding the knowledge that they bring to the table. For many, beginning with basics will be appropriate (e.g., define terms such as “epigenetics”). Be prepared to be flexible and responsive to the knowledge base that your audience has.

“Start with the assumption that people have no background information, start at the beginning of what you learned.”

– Activist

Tailor Your Responses

Listening is an important part of relaying information so that it is matched to language and interpretations. Tailor responses that are simplified for public consumption when appropriate. Listening also allows for combating misinformation and debunking myths, which can be more impactful than presenting facts or results.

"Language should be shared, and translated so that it is accessible, neutral, and simplified."

– CBO Leader

Use Visual Aids

Distill your research down to a few primary points and use illustrations, graphics, and images to support the information to make it more approachable. Scientists are more relatable when they share stories about what motivated their research or share images of themselves and their labs.

"Why do you do what you do? Where? What lab? Be relatable, present yourself as a human. Personalize the research. How would you talk to your aunt about your research? She wants to know why you care."

– Decision Leader

Disseminate Information Outside of Academia

Decision makers do not have clear paths for reaching into academic institutions to connect with experts. They prefer information that is delivered in person via one-on-one meetings, seminars, or conferences so they can ask clarifying questions and connect with experts. Be sure to include your contact information on presentation slides and print handouts.

"The back and forth dialogue in person is helpful for asking questions like: What does that word mean? I don't understand that acronym. You're losing me here."

– Elected Official Staff Member

Develop One Page Fact Sheets

Work with community engagement staff who can help translate your research. One-page fact sheets that focus what your science means for public health are most useful. Fact sheets should be hyperlinked to additional resources including journal articles, supporting information, and labs with contact information.

"The one-pager is still the main currency in policy making circles despite the internet. This is because most decision makers are incredibly overwhelmed and will never do research like this [one-pager] on their own. Our goal is to do their work for them and present the most compelling findings in a concise way so they can be our ambassadors in the policy making process."

– Decision Leader

For more information on Communicating Environmental Health Science visit: <https://cures.wayne.edu/outreach/communicatingscience> or contact Carrie Leach at carrieleach@wayne.edu

cures.wayne.edu

environmentalhealth.tamu.edu

mleead.umich.edu

NIEHS funding PA-17-317 Supplemental Administrative Grant



National Institute of
Environmental Health Sciences