GRADUATE COMMUNICATION ASSIGNMENT

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Sustainability initiatives are aimed at designing strong solutions that incorporate efficiency into existing systems. However, the feasibility of execution is highly impacted by both economic constraints as well as effective communication approaches. A huge gap exists that needs to be bridged between the ideation and implementation phases. One of the best avenues to pursue is to provide a connection between the consumers and project audiences, and the relevant knowledge and motivation for action. Outreach programs and strong public relations campaigns have attempted to cater to this necessity, but have not received much traction due to overuse of conventional methods and lack of innovation for developing creative communication channels.

This report aims to document some ideas that could be deployed by city departments, working closely with sustainability initiatives, to share their success stories and future projects with government and corporate officials and citizens. These would create a culture of sustainability in citizens' daily lives and make the curious souls cognizant about how their cities envision a sustainable and also prosperous future.

CONNECT Through Events

Mixers & Networking Events | Students Presentations & Posters | Lunch & Learns

The cities can hold events where citizens from diverse backgrounds, including students, industry professionals, educators, etc. are invited to come and discuss ideas the cities want to promote. These events would provide a common platform for all kinds of stakeholders to engage, and allow organizations to explore potential partnerships while working towards achieving similar goals. It would also be a great way to expand business-to-business networks and acquire feedback from different perspectives.

CONNECT Through Educational Programs

Engaging Youth

Engaging young minds and incorporating sustainability as a healthy way of life is an approach to better communicate the ideas and pillars of sustainable living. For example, in Gilbert, if bulk waste is to be recycled, the different categories of waste need to be separated. This can either be done at the source or at a transfer station, the source being a cheaper and more effective method. The problem with this approach is that the people sorting it at the source might not have the knowledge or awareness to do it correctly or efficiently. Hence, educating young people about the simple but effective changes in everyday life could be a good way of communicating ideas.

Demonstrations | Workshops | Facility Tours

Another good practice may be to invite citizens to tour city facilities (e.g. material recovery facilities, water/wastewater treatment plants) to gain a better understanding of how things work behind the scenes and appreciate the city's efforts and initiatives. This might also motivate citizens to include more sustainable actions in their own lifestyles. Events and workshops could also have an educational component and include skill-building activities, such as rainwater harvesting and household waste segregation.

CONNECT Through Social Media and Entertainment

Increase Accessibility | Explore Social Media

One major problem cities inadvertently create is making important and relevant documents difficult to find, and only available on the specific department's website. To mitigate this problem, cities could "get with the times" and create social media accounts (e.g. Instagram, Youtube) to share relatable images and other visuals such as memes, infographics, and photographs of city events with the public. These could also be shared through blogs in which the city could add more detailed information that is not as appropriate for outlets like Facebook. Through blogs, the city could take on longer-term information sharing projects by creating a "series" or posting regular updates. The blogs can also be promoted in social media platforms. These methods add a great entertainment factor while also distributing important and relevant city information.

Using Visuals

Additionally, cities could start adding interesting sections, like comic strips or short stories, to the informational documents which they provide their residents. Visual representation is known to be more impactful compared to traditionally written information. Being creative and providing concise but effective information in these representations could be a way of gathering more attention and communicating certain ideas. Cities could also make visual aids specifically with the intent to distribute to the public to share information. For example, Phoenix valley citizens do not know where their water comes from. Therefore, making fun posters or videos that communicate how far water has to travel to reach Phoenix – and thus intrinsically emphasizing the value of water – would help educate citizens in an entertaining way while also familiarizing them with their home.

CONNECT Through Inclusion

Connecting City Council, Officials, and Citizens

Establishing a feedback mechanism between the city, its officials, and its citizens throughout the project process would be very beneficial. Taking note of the directly affected consumers/audiences' opinions would allow future plans to be more successful. For example, city workers can prepare and submit surveys for the residents in collaboration with the town's communication team. Not only is it a great way of communicating the fact that the town is actually taking initiatives, but it also helps city officials to understand residents' opinions on the subject at hand. This way, the city can be in a better position to make a more educated decision on how to approach the project. There can also be a lack of communication between the council and officials. For example, in Goodyear, increasing social capital between the city council, the public works department, and the newly formed West Valley Water Association would allow for better communication between organizations of differing governance roles in order to create and implement better plans in less time.

CONNECT Through a Universal Communication Plan

A general pathway for communication strategies can be described by the following five-step process. This can be modified regardless of the communicator (e.g. the city, a sub-regional organization) or who is receiving the information (e.g. the city council, the general public).

1. *Meetings with local decision-makers:* Talking about research and planning allows for greater discussion and understanding around the research process, making it more likely for the decision makers to support policy recommendations that stem from created reports.

2. *Community engagement:* As the city serves the residents who live there, it is important to engage with the community to understand their perspectives on major issues and their desires for their local community. This can be in the form of town hall meetings, paper or electronic surveys, or informal interviews with residents.
3. *Formal partnerships:* Partnering with other organizations can provide resources, credibility, and salience to the work of an organization or city in order to further advance studies and projects from planning to action.
4. *Informal relationships:* Building social capital is important as information changes hands from the researchers/planners to the decision-makers. Increased social capital provides opportunities for support, promote, and defend the planning and recommendations of the city or organization.
5. *Policy briefs and short reports:* Verbally translating long and/or technical reports into shorter executive summaries, policy briefs, and infographics will allow those unfamiliar with the subject matter of the report to easily understand the findings and suggestions that come from extensive research and planning in ways that appeal to decision-makers.

Using this communication pathway--in full or only the applicable parts--can allow for better communication and more effective implementation of research, planning, and recommendations. Below are specific ways in which this communication pathway can be applied to each of the cities and projects, with Table 1 providing a brief overview.

Table 1: Communication engagement activities by project teams

	Gilbert: Bulk Solid Waste	*Goodyear: WVWA Strategic Plan*	*Goodyear: Drought Proofing*
Meetings and/or presentations with local decision-makers	✓	✓	✓
Community engagement	✓	✓	✓
Formal partnerships	✓		✓
Informal partnerships with city council (to build social capital)	✓	✓	✓
Policy briefs, short reports, and other material	✓	✓	✓

Gilbert | Bulk Solid Waste

The Town of Gilbert officials were very involved and showed active participation throughout the data collection phase and the entire project in general. This allowed the students and the stakeholders to form strong communication channels. Having established these allowed the smooth flow of information making the research holistic and recommendations meaningful. Apart from a presentation outlining the project findings to a group of senior professionals working within different city departments, the project team will also be presenting to decision makers within the Public Works department to better communicate the necessity to recycle and divert bulk waste.

A more summarized version of the report could be presented in the form of a visually attractive infographic which can be creatively designed to be aesthetically pleasing while still

getting the message across. Taking into consideration the fact that a survey designed during the course of the project received 1,200 responses from residents within a week, the residents seem enthusiastic towards actively participating in the betterment of Gilbert's services. An informational video/short documentary entailing the bulk waste problem, existing initiatives by the town, and the future roadmap could prove to be a quick and effective method to gather traction for the need to take action against the current bulk waste problems faced by the town.

In addition to the video, the infographic and the detailed report should be made available to the public, and this availability should be clearly communicated to achieve maximum outreach. A portal for feedback can also be established where the town can have constant communication with its residents to adhere to any concerns or suggestion they may have.

Goodyear | West Valley Water Association Strategic Plan

The main audience for this project is the current and future West Valley Water Association (WVWA) board of directors, staff, committees, and officers. As a higher-level audience, the project documents do not need much alteration to successfully communicate the content. An executive summary highlighting the main points should be provided to grab attention and convey major findings. The full report should be available for further examination if someone desires.

These documents should also be made available to the public, preferably both on the WVWA and city websites, so that participating cities can learn about and understand the WVWA's strategic plan for water management. In this case, the executive summary should include eye-catching colors, photographs, easy-to-read bullet points, and activities or actions the public can partake in to help achieve the WVWA's goals. Along these lines, there should be a WVWA presence at relevant community engagement events throughout the West Valley to spread word and gain more traction. Finally, increasing social capital between the WVWA and West Valley city councils will allow for greater likelihood of implementing WVWA recommendations and strategies.

Goodyear | "Drought Proofing"

Attempting to drought-proof Goodyear will require extensive cooperation and collaboration between the city government, private and public stakeholders, as well as residents and homeowners. While the project focused on residential outdoor water usage, making cross-sector changes will be necessary to normalize conservation and successfully achieve drought resiliency. To effectively address the interactions and influences between these three main groups, Goodyear's communication plan must be circular as well as interconnected. The partnerships that must be built are described in table 2.

Table 2: Partnerships must be built between the public sector, the private sector, and individual users for successful communication of drought-proofing strategies.

Public Sector	Private Sector	Individual Users

• City Government*
  ○ City Council
  ○ Relevant departments (Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Economic Development)
  ○ Water Conservation Committee
• Other West Valley Cities
• West Valley Water Association
• Elementary, middle-, high- schools
• Sustainability organizations/water conservation groups
	• Homebuilders (developers, contractors, engineers, landscapers)
	• Homeowner Associations
	• Car washes
	• Golf courses (and other water intensive industries)
	• Newspapers
	• Marketing organizations
	• Businesses indoor use/ outdoor water features
	• Private schools
		• Homeowners
		• Non-Homeowners

*Goodyear does not have a centralized Sustainability Department

Conclusion

Despite the strides made in sustainability within cities, communicating related research, initiatives, and policies remains a significant obstacle. Through working on projects with the Town of Gilbert and the City of Goodyear, we provide suggestions of different types of communication strategies to apply to varying situations. The broad categories of communication include: events, educational programs, media and entertainment, and inclusion. We also provided a universal, five-step communication plan that can be applied in any city, following up with examples from the specific projects. By implementing and following these recommendations, cities can better engage the public and other stakeholders about sustainability initiatives, with the goal of greater success in implementation in the future.