CITY ENERGY
A JOINT PROJECT of NRDC + IMT

DECEMBER 2018

MUST-HAVES FOR PUBLICLY LAUNCHING AND SHARING PROGRESS

ABOUT CITY ENERGY PROJECT AND THE CITY ENERGY PROJECT RESOURCE LIBRARY

A joint initiative of the Institute for Market Transformation and the Natural Resources Defense Council, the City Energy Project supported bold yet practical ways to deploy energy efficiency at the city level to boost local economies, reduce pollution, and create healthier, more prosperous communities nationwide.

The project partnered with 20 local governments across the U.S. from 2013–2018 to design locally appropriate energy efficiency policies and programs. Building upon the past successes and innovation of cities, the City Energy Project established best-in-class practices for energy efficiency to be customized and replicated nationwide. Models and recommendations have been distilled into the City Energy Project Resource Library. This curated set of resources contains the necessary blueprints for a city government to craft and implement customized solutions to productively manage energy efficiency initiatives across commercial, multifamily, and public buildings in its jurisdiction.

For more information on the participating cities and counties in the City Energy Project, and to search the City Energy Project Resource Library, visit cityenergyproject.org.

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INTRODUCTION

Success of a city-led building performance policy or program depends on engagement and outreach. A critical part of this engagement is an official public launch and knowing how to engage your community by sharing progress and results thereafter. This, in turn, requires working continuously with your city's communications team and external media, local community organizations, and partners to amplify your message. It also requires preparing a standard set of communications materials that effectively and efficiently promote your activities in ways that attract participants and gain ongoing support from residents and businesses in the community.

This guide will prepare a program advisor, manager, or director to publicly announce his or her program to as many stakeholders as possible, regardless of that advisor's formal communications training. It outlines key communications components that help establish buy-in and support from communications teams, allies, and external media in a productive manner. It was developed based on experiences launching programs in 20 U.S. cities as part of the City Energy Project. These best practices should be customized for a city and initiated during program planning in advance of a public launch date.

BOSTON

IDENTIFY AND MEET WITH YOUR CITY'S COMMUNICATIONS STAFF

A city communications team, which often includes a public information officer or a mayor's press secretary or officer, can be very helpful in drawing attention to city programs. Their offices have established media and community relationships and deploying communications materials such as a media alert or press release via a city department or mayor's office often carries reputational heft. It is imperative that program managers or advisors understand the city's specific roles and responsibilities for conducting media and community outreach so that appropriate review and approval processes are followed.
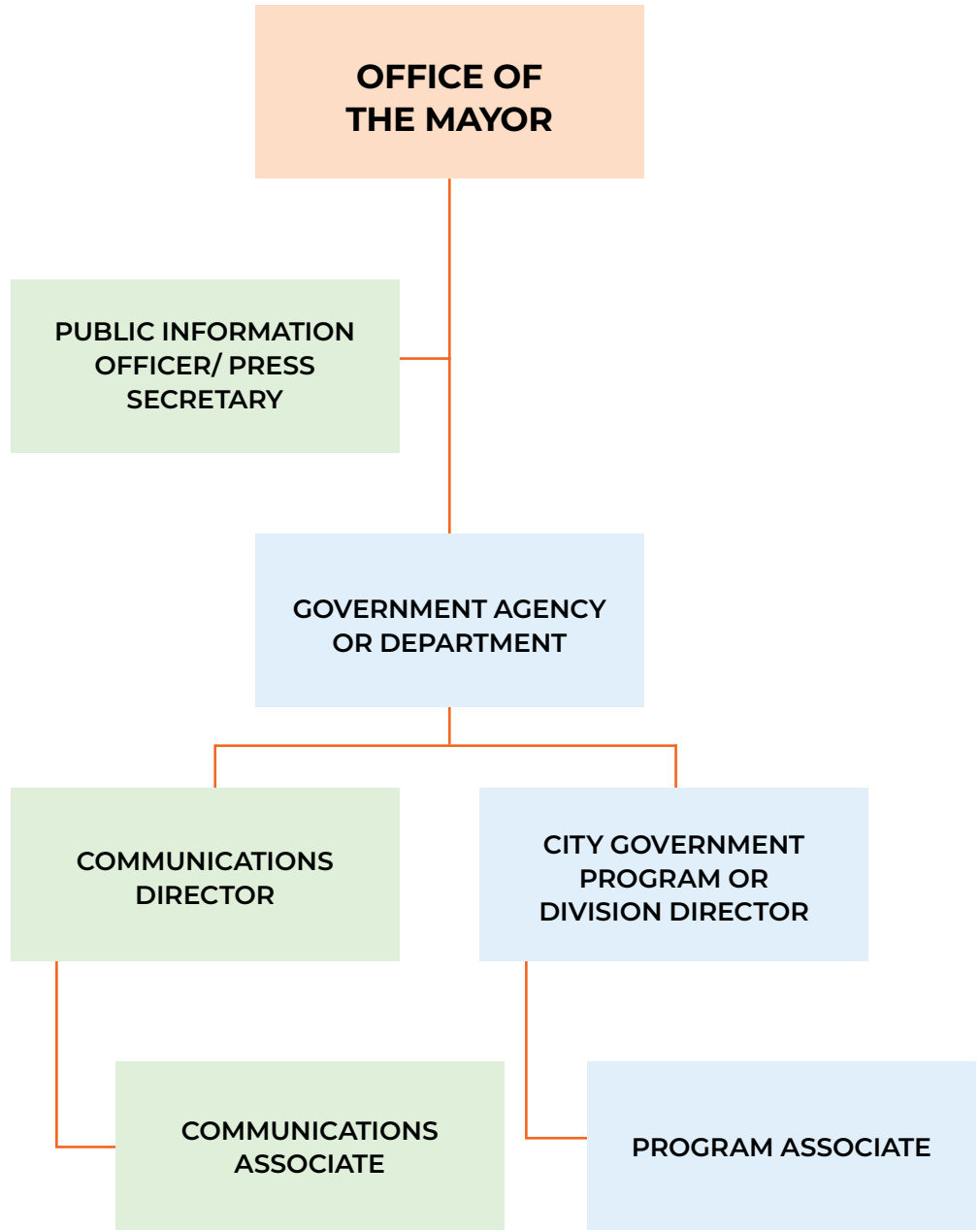
A key step in getting to know communications staff is understanding who's who.

THE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR is typically staffed with a Public Information Officer or Press Secretary, along with support staff and team members to manage the mayor's public engagements, such as participating in events or making press announcements. Public mayoral support of a program is often extremely beneficial in terms of an initiative's credibility and visibility. These communications professionals play a very important role in overseeing the mayor's speaking schedule and can provide recommendations for when will be best to announce a launch.

CITY GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS STAFF operate at various branches of city government and often support agency and mayoral priorities and perform media outreach on behalf of city government initiatives and programs.

CITY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT AND PROGRAM STAFF provide the details and information needed to prepare public communications, often serving as the points of contact to the public and helping to answer technical questions from press or local media. Regardless of departmental structure, communications team members are often understaffed and face many competing priorities for their attention. Recognizing

this, program managers or advisors should identify and meet with city communications staff before the request for support is needed. Get to know your key communications point people by introducing yourself and learning more about how they work. An introductory meeting or interview provides a wealth of helpful information that can be used to establish a win-win relationship between program staff and communications staff.

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KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK A COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

- What is your process for conducting media and community outreach? What kind of information is most useful for them to have ahead of time? What information would be most useful for you to run outreach plans and ideas up the chain of approval?

- How much time do you typically like to have when preparing a press release? For example, what is the city's process for drafting and obtaining an approved quote from the mayor for use in a press release? Who are the approved spokespeople for a city's energy or environmental efforts? Who should be involved in vetting media inquiries and who has authority for approving interviews?

- Who are the approved spokespeople for the city's energy or environmental efforts? Who should be involved in vetting media inquiries and who has authority to approve interviews?

- How can our program team be most helpful in developing a first draft of the announcement? Is there any existing example of a press release we could use as an example?

- After announcing the program with a press release, can the news be shared in other city channels (newsletters, social media, media events, upcoming mayoral speaking events, etc.)? What is the approval process for drafting content for these channels and then distributing that content?

- If hosting a launch event, what would be needed for the mayor or media to participate? Are there any industry or local events you would recommend that could be combined with our launch to attract more participants?

- Does the city have any style or branding guidelines that we can use or reference in creating our materials?

- If a program engages an external communications team to assist with outreach efforts, are there any protocols regarding keeping your internal communications team updated on the work?

LOS ANGELES

STEP 2

DEVELOP A LAUNCH PLAN AND PREPARE ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Before initiating any launch outreach both internally to city communications staff and externally to targeted participants, media, or allied organizations, it's helpful to think through some basic background information.

In developing this launch plan, there are several essential communications tools that should be prepared as a baseline of effort. It is a good idea to ask the city communications team if it can provide any style or branding guidelines to help you develop materials, or to reference when creating your own. This can include guidelines for developing logos and using existing city communications templates for developing your communications materials.

- **IDENTIFY YOUR CORE AUDIENCES**
  Who are you most seeking to engage with your launch? Are you targeting Class A office space owners and tenants in the central business district? Multifamily property owners in the city limits and surrounding county?

- **DEFINE THE GOAL FOR ACTION AND ASSOCIATED AUDIENCE ASK**
  What do you want your core audience to do once they know of your program? Are you looking for them to register for a challenge program via the official website? If so, what is the exact URL you want them to have? Think through the specific actions you want people to take as a result of your outreach and keep it simple and short. Focus on no more than two key actions so that communications remain focused.

- **SET DEADLINES TO GET TO LAUNCH**
  What are your program's deadlines and how might they affect pacing for outreach efforts? Are there critical dates that may affect the launch, such as an upcoming release of a city's sustainability progress report or a key community event at which you might want to announce your program? What kind of lead time do you have for preparing your launch materials?

REACHING YOUR AUDIENCE

In thinking about your target audiences, it is helpful to brainstorm what media channels might be most effective in reaching them and to then discuss that with your communications team. What local papers do they read? What are the local radio and tv stations that they listen to or watch? Are there local business journals that are most read by targeted participants or affected stakeholders?

If there is a particular outlet in your sights, you may want to consider offering an exclusive, meaning the outlet is given exclusive access to the announce the news and will be able to run a story ahead of any other outlets. Your communications team can advise you on the process of offering an exclusive media pitch.

In addition, sometimes support may be needed from an external communications firm and budget should be allocated to hire consultants such as communications consultants and graphic designers to write and design materials. The price range for these services can vary widely depending on the level of effort needed.

RENO

PREPARING ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS MATERIALS

PRESS RELEASE

When announcing your program or policy, you should aim to release an official statement or press announcement from the Office of the Mayor or directly from your city government agency or department. Although this will not always be possible depending on the political climate or support within the Mayor's Office for your program or policy, and is usually decided with consultation from your communications team, it should be attempted regardless. This broad announcement can generate local press coverage to drive awareness of your program and often reaches many city residents and businesses, you may not already have in your contact lists.

BRING IN SUPPORTIVE VOICES

When drafting a press release, it is helpful to think about supportive voices that may be able to provide a quote, such as the director of an allied organization or, more ideally, a prominent local voice that is also representative of the core audience you're seeking to engage, such as a well-known commercial property owners who can speak to the benefits of participating in the program or investing in energy efficiency in a building. If you are launching an initiative that is co-branded, it is also helpful to see if any partner organizations will issue a complementary press release of their own. This is addressed more in this guide in **STEP 3: FIND CHAMPIONS TO SPREAD THE WORD.**

Although you can't assume everyone will get your press release, you are more likely to get the word out by doing so. In addition to the general recipients of a press announcement, the announcement can be shared and forwarded to your contact lists.

TIPS FOR WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

When publicly announcing your policy or program, be sure to follow these tips when writing a news announcement such as a press release.

(**DOWNLOAD TIPS >**)

PUBLIC WEBSITE OR WEBPAGES

An independent website or branded webpage within a city's existing site should be the centralized place to post key deadlines and program information, frequently asked questions (FAQs), upcoming events or trainings, technical resources, press announcements, factsheets, case studies, and any additional public information related to the building performance policy or program. For programs or initiatives that require action such as participant sign-up, websites or webpages should be set up to process these sign ups and should make the process for doing so prominent and easy.

The city communications team often can direct you and answer any questions you have about hosting a website within the city's domain and content management system. Often, the city communications team also grants permission to develop a unique website independent to the city's systems. Regardless of where the site is hosted, budgeting a minimal amount of money to purchase customized URLs that can be directed to the site is extremely helpful, especially when using a website that is deeper on a city's site and thus has a very long, hard-to-remember URL. This allows you to promote easy to remember URLs and reinforces program branding.

WHAT KIND OF WEBSITE CAN I AFFORD?

The typical cost of a website can range from staff time to produce an internal website on a city site, to a few hundred dollars to purchase a domain URL and basic, template design theme via a content platform such as WordPress, to tens of thousands of dollars to more customized options, depending on the types of functionalities needed to operate the site. Often specialty design and custom site features run at greater costs than using an existing city government's website system. The level of complexity also affects timing as the more complex the site, the more time needed for creation. Often, a basic site can suffice for launching a program, as long as it contains critical information about what the program is, when deadlines are, and what action people need to take to engage or participate.

ST. LOUIS BENCHMARKING WEBSITE

DO I NEED TO CREATE A BRAND NAME OR LOGO?

Not all policies and programs need individual brand names and logos. Policy names are usually very straight forward and their falls within established city brands. Orlando's Building Energy and Water Efficiency Strategy, for example, is a component of the larger Green Works Orlando sustainability brand. However, public engagement programs such as a challenge program may benefit from having an easy to remember brand name and logo.

LEARN MORE

Tips for Writing a Case Study or Fact Sheet

Craft compelling fact sheets and case studies to highlight your program and sucessful projects.

DOWNLOAD TIPS >

FACT SHEETS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Fact sheets and frequently asked questions (FAQs) should be easily accessible on a program website and linked in any outreach and press announcements. They provide basic information and can be supplemented by materials such as case studies or infographics as needed for additional detail. Case studies can help shine a spotlight on potential benefits, and impacts, as well as feature a prominent business or efficiency advocate in the community. They can also be used as internal tools to brief staff and public officials on your program. Infographics (information + graphics) are a easy-to-digest graphic visual representation of basic but important information, data, or knowledge. These often work well to outline processes and patterns.

THE ABCS OF FAQS

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are a stock set of questions and answers provide consistent and readily available information on the most commonly sought-after information. Think of the five W's and one H of communications: Who, Why, What, When, Where, and How.

- Who should participate in the program?

- Why should they care and participate? (When addressing this, it is important to think about why the audience would care about the initiative, not why the city thinks it is important.)

- What will the program do?

- When will it take place?

- Where will it take place?How do they get involved?

SIGN-UP MECHANISMS FOR EMAIL UPDATES AND NEWSLETTERS

Programs should create sign-up mechanisms for email updates or newsletters so that you can send updates and information to program participants or stakeholders and building owners affected by a policy. Contact lists creation and maintenance can be automated via services such as Mailchimp or manually updated. By setting up an opt-in subscription option

that is hosted on your website and linked in your fact sheets and FAQs, you can collect basic contact information and email addresses. Be aware that the more information you require for sign up, the less likely people are to do so. The bare minimum request should be name and email address. You should also disclose whether their information will be shared in any way among program supporters or external organizations.

OPTIONAL COMPONENT: HOSTING A LAUNCH EVENT

Hosting an in-person launch event is not necessary but is often beneficial to drawing attention to a program in which you are seeking active participation or the passage of a policy to drive awareness among those stakeholders who will be affected by the policy. Events are effective tools for engaging a Mayor or other high-level city officials, spurring private sector interest and support, and garnering media coverage. Launch events are city-led or can be tied into existing community events, with the latter option often requiring less logistical legwork and, sometimes, less financial burden as you can tap into venues that are already scheduled for the larger event. If considering a launch event, you should prepare the following elements:

OPTIONAL COMPONENT: PREPARE A MEDIA ADVISORY

This announcement is sent in advance of the in-person launch event to media and press. Similar to an invitation it ncludes all details and information on how to attend an event like a launch, ribbon-cutting, or recognition ceremony. The media advisory will contain the very basics: who, what, and when elements so that media (local papers, business journals, tv stations, radio stations, and prominent local bloggers, if applicable) is aware of the upcoming event. This should be sent ahead of an event to entice reporters to attend and cover the event. This should not be the formal press release; the formal press release should be released at the event itself.

For Immediate Release
Contact: Name, Phone Number.

MEDIA ADVISORY

- What: City to Launch [Program Name]

- Representatives attending: (include big draw names that may be available for interviews and/or will be featured in the presentation)

  » Mayor/City Rep

  » Sustainability Rep

  » Name, Title, Success story company

  » Name, Title, Partner (if needed and included in speaking agenda)

- When: Date, Time

- Where: Location

CREATE A RUN OF SHOW

This is the basic outline of your event that details what will happen when. It should note who will speak when and for how long each speaker is scheduled. In putting together an event, you should allow time for several supportive voices to speak. See Step 3: Find champions to spread the word.

RUN OF SHOW

WORKING TIMELINE:

0 – 0:30	Networking
0:30	Kickoff ceremony
	Project announcement
	Mayoral remarks
	Details of program
	1-2 showcases from project or local success stories
1:30 – close	Networking

TARGET AUDIENCES:

Real estate community, owners, property managers. Building owners, other potential participants, and local leaders.

SECONDARY AUDIENCES:

Service providers for whom this program will generate jobs/work, local media.

DRAFT TALKING POINTS FOR PARTICIPATING OFFICIALS

Provide guidance to all speakers as to what elements or takeaways of the policy or program you'd like them to highlight specifically. Think in advance about the type of support you would like them to publicly offer in their remarks.

HOST A RECOGNITION EVENT

Similar to a launch event, recognition events offer opportunities to acknowledge city partners for their support, and efforts made in meeting energy savings targets and implementing efficiency improvements. In preparing for a recognition event a city will follow the same steps as a launch event but might also consider in-person recognition items such as certificates, signed letters from public officials like the Mayor, or plaques.

FIND CHAMPIONS TO SPREAD THE WORD

The goal of launch communications is to drive awareness. The more messengers you recruit to support and amplify your message, the better. Find your local champions—community leaders, supporters in your targeted audiences, local businesses and residents, allied organizations, and more—and ask them to be your megaphone. Seek out voices in the community that will carry more weight than your announcement will on its own.

ASK FOR AMPLIFICATION

Program staff and leadership can use their own professional and social media networks to help promote the program launch. Help them out by drafting and providing sample social media photos, as well as identifying key city accounts, they can follow, retweet, like, and share.

ASK FOR ENDORSEMENT

Local supporters and businesses can be recruited to provide supportive testimonials for press releases, interviews, and case studies. How have they benefits from the initiatives you're launching? For example, in Denver, when the City and County of Denver launched the Denver City Energy Project voluntary building benchmarking program in October 2014, the City Energy Project advisor recruited the sustainability chair from the Brown Palace Hotel to participate in the formal press release and launch event. The Brown Palace Hotel and Spa is a well-known property in the area and the sustainability chair spoke to the benefits of investing in energy efficiency, citing recent improvements that save the hotel 26 percent on electricity costs and 24 percent on natural gas costs per occupied room. Brown Palace Hotel and Spa also released its own press release supporting the city's efforts.

Supportive local voices can also be recruited to pen favorable opinion pieces such as Op-ed (first-person articles) or letters to the editor for local media outlets that run in conjunction with your launch efforts.

LEARN MORE
Tips for Working With Media

Attract local and national media to help tell your energy story.

(**DOWNLOAD TIPS >**)

CHECKLIST TO LAUNCH

As you develop your essential materials and prepare to launch, the following checklist recaps critical steps to get you to launch.

A CHECKLIST OF LAUNCH COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

✓ Meet with your city communications team to understand roles, responsibilities and how to execute on your plans.

✓ Develop materials for launch and prepare the right amount of background and details on your policy or program.

- Press release
- Website or webpage
- Fact sheet
- FAQs
- Email and newsletter sign-up
- Optional: case studies
- Optional: infographics
- Optional: in-person launch event with the Mayor, media, and important local stakeholders

✓ Identify who will serve as spokespeople and representatives to the city government if media or other city officials follow-up for information.

✓ Share your announcement broadly and with your specific contacts. Grow your network and ask your colleagues, local supporters, and media to help you too.

COMMUNICATIONS TIPS

- **WRITING A PRESS RELEASE**
- **PREPARING A CASE STUDY OR FACTSHEET**
- **WORKING WITH MEDIA**
- **WRITING A BLOG**

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR MARKET TRANSFORMATION AND THE NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR MARKET TRANSFORMATION

The Institute for Market Transformation (IMT) is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that catalyzes widespread and sustained demand for energy-efficient buildings. Founded in 1996 and based in Washington, D.C., IMT specializes in driving the intersection of real estate and public policy to make buildings more productive, affordable, valuable, and resilient. A trusted, non-partisan leader, IMT focuses on innovative and pragmatic solutions that fuel greater investment in energy-efficient buildings to meet local market priorities. IMT offers hands-on technical assistance and market research, alongside expertise in policy and program development and deployment and promotion of best practices and knowledge exchange. Its efforts lead to important policy outcomes, widespread changes in real estate practices, and lasting market demand for energy efficiency—resulting in greater benefits for all people, the economy, and the environment. Visit us at www.imt.org and follow us on Twitter @IMT_speaks.

ABOUT THE NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 3 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Bozeman, MT, and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org and follow us on Twitter @NRDC.

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