



## HOW TO ENGAGE WITH HARD-TO-REACH AUDIENCES

### The Importance of Reaching All Residents

Local and state governments must connect with all residents, regardless of their social, economic, or geographic status. Hard-to-reach audiences often need government services the most, especially during a crisis. Determining how to reach these residents during blue-sky days can make it easier to connect with them during an emergency.

#### 1. What makes an audience hard to reach?

Multiple factors can make an audience hard to reach. In many instances, more than one of these issues are in play. They include:

- Geographic location
- Language difference
- Political beliefs
- Misinformation or distrust
- Demographic differences

#### 2. Methods to reach hard-to-reach audiences.

There are different strategies for reaching out to residents. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Rural residents:** Utilize houses of worship, industry organizations, schools
- **Unhoused residents:** Utilize houses of worship, schools, nonprofits
- **Immigrant communities:** Utilize places of worship, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, translators, and leaders within the immigrant community

**Example:** A county has a significant immigrant population that does not speak English and is employed in agriculture. Effective methods for reaching them include connecting through the North Carolina Farm Bureau or El Centro Hispano.

#### 3. Understanding your audience is crucial.

Audiences differ from county to county, so it is crucial to understand whom you are trying to engage. Here are some factors government agencies should know about their residents to effectively connect with them.

- Demographics
- Region
- Age
- Gender
- Experience

## WHERE ARE PEOPLE GETTING THEIR NEWS?

- TV:** 63% of adults 65 and older use TV for political news, compared to 10% of adults under 30.  
--Pew Research Center Study
- News Websites or Apps:** People in their 30s and 40s are more likely to use news websites or apps for news.
- Print Newspapers:** Older adults are more likely to read print newspapers or a combination of print and digital.

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To effectively reach hard-to-engage audiences, it is necessary to understand where they get their news. This research can be helpful as you are creating your strategy.

## WHERE ARE PEOPLE GETTING THEIR NEWS ?

- Social Media:** Younger people are likelier to use social media for news, especially TikTok. For example, 46% of adults under 30 use social media for political news, compared to 7% of adults 65 and older.  
--Pew Research Center Study



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#### 4. **Staying nonpartisan.**

Remaining nonpartisan will cultivate credibility and trust while fostering fairness and inclusivity. Engaging a disconnected population can be challenging, so they need to feel represented. An environment where people understand the government can foster greater trust and facilitate better communication.

#### 5. **Methods for engaging with audiences.**

Choose social media platforms — Facebook, Instagram, X, Bluesky, YouTube, and Nextdoor — that work best for your audience.

#### 6. **Podcasts are a possibility!**

Podcasts provide a chance to connect personally. They also allow the targeting of niche audiences while offering convenience to listeners. Specific audiences can be easily reached through podcasts.

#### 7. **Engage surrogates to tell your story.**



Surrogates are effective communication tools because they serve as intermediaries, helping convey information, emotions, or ideas in ways that are often more accessible or clearer to the intended audience.

### 8. What makes a superb surrogate?

- Trustworthy
- Expert
- Diverse
- Great communicator

### 9. Who could make a superb surrogate?

Look in your community for people who can be objective and provide perspective and clarity to your residents. Some people who could be effective surrogates include sheriff, fire chief, emergency management director, business leader, educator, religious leader, activist, and local celebrity influencer.

### 10. Identify the influencer.

An influencer is someone who can impact the opinions, behaviors, or purchasing decisions of others due to their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience. Influencers usually have large followings on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or X. They differ slightly from surrogates as they typically create more lifestyle-oriented content.

### 11. Investigate the influencer.

Understanding an influencer's identity and the opinions and beliefs they convey is essential. Their views should align with your message.

Questions to ask:

- Would they be a positive spokesperson?
- How many followers do they have?
- What's their audience engagement rate?
- How does their content relate to your story/message?
- Will they effectively connect with your target audience?

**Example:** @madelyneonthemove is an influencer specializing in travel. She has 192,000 followers on Instagram. In the weeks immediately after Hurricane Helene, she shared posts about relief and recovery efforts. She would be a valuable contact as the tourism season begins in North Carolina. Her influence could affect those considering whether the state is open for business and whether it's a good vacation destination.

### Final Thoughts

Creativity is essential for identifying the best strategies to engage hard-to-reach audiences. Once you pinpoint your audience and how to effectively reach them, this plan can be utilized during good and challenging times to ensure effective communication with all residents.