BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON OUTREACH

This section contains helpful background information on outreach in general and guidance for creating outreach materials.

What Is Outreach?

Outreach is the act of working with different populations of people to provide information or a service to which they have not yet had access or exposure. Typically, outreach involves meeting people where they are, educating them on an issue, and empowering them to act.

Who Are the Audiences?

The audience is the group of individuals you are targeting to receive your information. Materials in this toolkit are aimed at one of three audiences:

- General audience – Everyone, including the general public, K-12 teachers, and other educators, is included in this audience. Materials are developed at a level that most adults can understand.
- Scientists and regulators – Individuals with some level of scientific knowledge and understanding are included in this audience. Materials are developed assuming a level of scientific knowledge.
- Decision-makers – This audience includes managers and leaders in both the public and private sectors, as well as legislators—in other words, those with limited time and multiple priorities. Materials created for this audience prioritize providing information in a compact manner.

Although outreach materials are aimed at targeted audiences, they may be used by or for any audience with the understanding that some materials are more technical in nature.

What Are Some Best Practices for Outreach?

Below are some practices that will help you connect with your audience in the most effective way:

- **Research your audience.** If possible, before the event/meeting, determine the backgrounds of people likely to attend and cater your message to their level of knowledge. Burke (2015) provided a summary of tips and tricks for scientists to use in communicating with different audiences**.**
- **Use examples or analogies that are applicable to your audience.** When providing examples, make sure they are age-appropriate and take your audience's background into account.
- **Show the BIG picture.** Details are important but try not to overwhelm your audience with all the facts/examples at once. Like in a well-written essay or in a presentation, start with the big picture view before working your way to the more specific supporting facts.
- **Develop key messages supporting the main message you want to send to your audience.** Key messages will allow a more focused, well-prepared conversation to occur.
- **Sharing a clear concise action.** Provide an example of an action that you would like your audience to take.

Developing Messages

Key messages are the main points of information you want to share with your audience. They often address a specific area of concern or a question that needs to be answered. Key messages can be combined into mapped messages. Message mapping (Covello 2006) is a process that helps ensure that

important information is shared simply and concisely. More information on message mapping is available in Section 4.5.1.1 of ITRC's Risk Communication Toolkit. A good rule of thumb for messages is 3-9-27, which means there are 3 key points, delivered in 9 seconds, with no more than 27 total words for the message (Figure 1).
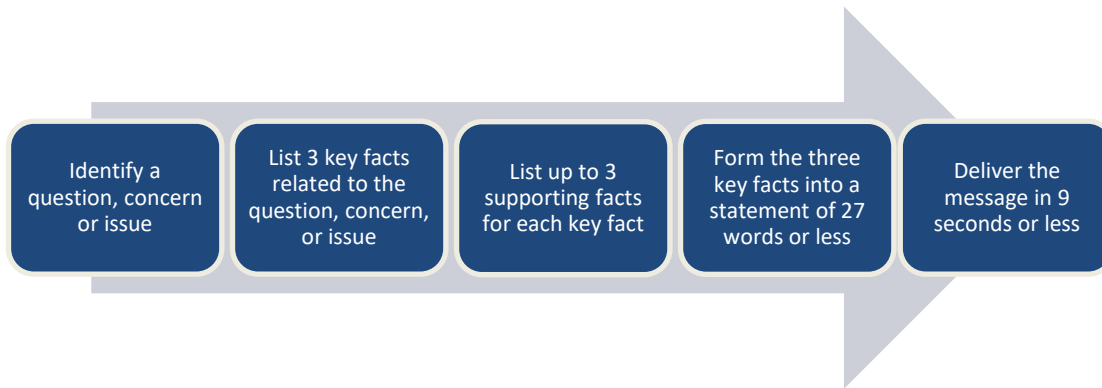

Figure 1. Process for creating a mapped message.

Source: ITRC Microplastics Team

A template, such as the one provided in Figure 2, can be used to create a mapped message.

Audience:	Question/Concern/Issue:	
Key Message/Fact 1:	Key Message/Fact 2:	Key Message/Fact 3:
Key Words/Supporting Fact 1.1:	Key Words/Supporting Fact 2.1:	Key Words/Supporting Fact 3.1:
Key Words/Supporting Fact 1.2:	Key Words/Supporting Fact 2.2:	Key Words/Supporting Fact 3.2:
Key Words/Supporting Fact 1.3:	Key Words/Supporting Fact 2.3:	Key Words/Supporting Fact 3.3:

Figure 2. Tool for message mapping.

Source: Covello (2006)

A completed example of a message map is included as Table 1 under the Social Media Materials section A blank Message Map tool is included in this toolkit.

Outreach Can Come in Many Forms

Below is a list of outreach formats used in the ITRC toolkit and information on how and when to use them.

Fact Sheets

Fact sheets can be used in all settings—schools, events, offices, meetings, conferences, etc. They can be structured to apply to all audiences or to specific groups of people. A well-designed fact sheet keeps the text brief, but has key words defined, and includes examples and graphics, if necessary. The goal of a fact sheet is to provide a surface-level introduction to a topic that inspires readers to do their own research and take further action. In a fact sheet, it's important to define the issue, explain why it's an issue, and suggest the action to be taken on the issue. It's helpful to provide links to additional resources for people to gain more information.

The ITRC Microplastics Team has designed fact sheets aimed at different audiences. The fact sheets can be used either in their single-sided, one-page format or mixed and matched to create double-sided two-page fact sheets. A list of microplastics outreach materials prepared by the team can be found in the index.

Slide Presentations

Slide presentations can be an effective tool for all audiences and could be used in schools, homeowner association meetings, office lunch-and-learn presentations, or research/academia symposia, or could be printed out to provide visuals to a legislative group. PowerPoint presentations can be extended or shortened easily to fit time needs and still contain a similar flow of information. A good rule of thumb is to have fewer words (around four bullets with four words each) and more pictures on each slide. A helpful flow for a PowerPoint includes an outline, body of the presentation (in which you include a description of the issue, an explanation of why it's an issue, and the action to be taken), and a conclusion slide to reiterate what has been covered. Make sure to practice the presentation aloud and time yourself before getting in front of an audience. Including interactive questions can foster discussion among the attendees and presenter. An example slide presentation can be found in the index.

Posters

Posters are typically used in a general public or scientific setting. For the general public, a poster could include an eye-catching graphic to move them to action through charismatic themes or bite-sized information. Scientific posters typically are found in an academic, conference, or research institution setting. The vocabulary used in these posters tends to cater to an audience with a stronger scientific background, and data and graphics are usually included on these posters. At conferences and research symposia, scientific posters can go hand-in-hand with elevator speeches because poster presenters will have only a few minutes to interact with attendees. An example poster can be found in the index.

Elevator Speech

Elevator speeches should be used in environments where there is not much time to go into detail about a topic. Key messages need to be presented effectively and efficiently. The speech should contain a quick synopsis of the issue, why it's an issue, and an action that people can take. A good rule of thumb is to keep your speech to under two minutes. An example elevator speech can be found in the Outreach Material for Decision-Makers section.

Social Media

Social media can include Facebook, X (a.k.a. Twitter), LinkedIn, TikTok, etc. Posts should grab people's attention quickly and not be too long. Using images in a post increases its visibility. Asking a question or providing facts/figures can be effective for reeling in interest. Some examples of social media posts appear in the Outreach Materials for a General Audience section.

Tips for Using Social Media

Social media is a popular tool for quickly spreading information to large audiences. Several social media platforms exist, and more are likely to be developed. Each platform reaches a different audience in its own way. Some well-established social media platforms are listed below. This list should not be construed as an endorsement by ITRC. When using social media to circulate your messages, it's important to consider the intended audience and how they interact with a social media platform before choosing a platform and designing a message. You also need to make sure your messages fit within the guidelines for the platform.

Hashtags (#) can be used with any of the social media listed below to help boost visibility of your post. The placement of the # symbol before a word or a phrase will categorize your post and make it accessible for audiences searching for that keyword. For example, if you place #environmentalremediation in your post, it will be linked to all other posts that also contain that same hashtag. Users can also specify which hashtags they want to follow/receive notice about postings of, making it easier to follow relevant news.

Here is a brief description of several social media platforms:

LinkedIn - LinkedIn is considered a more professional social media outlet focused on networking and learning. The audience tends to have a more in-depth educational background, so including links to scientific studies and resources can be beneficial. There is no limit to post length, and hashtags are helpful. The ITRC LinkedIn page posts about upcoming trainings and guidance documents.

YouTube - YouTube is a platform for posting videos. It's one of the most heavily trafficked websites and is highlighted in most Google searches. YouTube allows for posting both long- and short-version videos. The ITRC YouTube Channel has high-quality training videos on a variety of environmental topics.

Facebook - Facebook is considered a more recreational, quick source of information/news social media platform. The audience is generally less scholarly, so it's important not to be too technical. There is no word count limit for posts, but it's a good strategy to keep them shorter with a link to learn more. The ITRC Facebook page posts about upcoming trainings and guidance documents.

X (Twitter) - X is useful for communicating short bites of information. The character count is limited to 280, including spaces. Hyperlinks are encouraged but count as 23 of the allowed 280 characters. Abbreviations and misspellings of words to condense information are acceptable; X users are familiar with this. Because the X platform is tight on word count, make sure your message is concise. The ITRC X (Twitter) page posts about upcoming trainings and guidance documents.

Instagram - Instagram is a picture-based social media site. Its audience is recreational. Although Instagram captions allow generous word space, we recommend keeping messages short because most users are unlikely to click the expand button to read additional text. For a longer message, create a slideshow with a sentence on each picture slide. Instagram users like to interact with the information. A successful post should be eye-catching to get people's attention.

TikTok - TikTok can be a very useful tool for communicating about topics such as microplastics. TikTok's format is video rather than text, so messaging will need to be read like a script. The algorithm regularly

throws new content into the mix, so a new user may get a good deal of exposure on the app. TikTok users like action items—something they can do in response to the information.

Snapchat - Snapchat may not be the best social media platform for informational messages. The "snapchat stories" section of the app is more entertainment-based and very competitive. It's unlikely that users will navigate to or stay engaged with this messaging.