

Oyster Blueprint 2021-2025
Communications and Outreach Strategy
Draft Recommendations April 2020

Overarching goal:

Create communication and outreach strategies that engages stakeholders and the general public to actively support Blueprint goals and actions. Measure effectiveness of these strategies through direct participation in achieving actions, as well as web analytics and media stories.

Workgroup members:

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Background:

For nearly two decades, the NC Oyster Steering Committee has developed a variety of outreach and communication strategies that have engaged thousands of stakeholders and informed the public about the Blueprint efforts. It has developed a website for the Blueprint, produced an annual progress report, organized workshops and conferences, and engaged the media in press events and through press releases. Organizations that participate in the oyster steering committee have also organized educational volunteer activities and sessions to help the general public better understand and support Blueprint actions. These efforts have provided meaningful and engaging communication content to a variety of targeted audiences.

The messaging has been that oysters are vital to North Carolina's coastal ecology and economy. They filter water, provide food and create reefs that build homes for more fish. These ecosystem services, in turn, support jobs and provide economic opportunities for coastal communities. Stakeholders reached range from individuals and entities directly involved with oyster work including federal, state and local government agencies, as well as oyster growers, commercial fishers, academics, conservation organizations, and other engaged stakeholders. Outreach has targeted tourists in the state who contribute to the coastal economy. There has also been active engagement of students in volunteer activities and learning field trips. With widespread visible stakeholder and public support, the oyster steering committee has been successful in engaging lawmakers to garner their enthusiasm and appropriations for future oyster work.

Accomplishments thus far:

A comprehensive annual report accompanied by quarterly newsletters has been distributed targeting a relatively small audience primarily consisting of stakeholder organizations participating in the Oyster Steering Committee. Bi-annual Oyster Summits have drawn great numbers of various participants throughout the state, and have served as an effective method

for communicating accomplishments associated with the plan. Multiple stakeholder groups are present at the summits including professionals from the shellfish aquaculture industry, representatives from state and federal agencies, state legislators across the political spectrum, staff from non-profits, researchers, university partners, and passionate individuals. The North Carolina Coastal Federation-run website, ncoysters.org, serves as a clearinghouse for all things related to North Carolina oysters, successfully highlighting accomplishments from a variety of stakeholders. In 2019, social media accounts were launched in conjunction with this website.

The entities represented in this strategy workgroup all have oyster focused information available on their respective websites that includes educational materials, information on their projects, and more. Communication strategies have engaged legislators and the General Assembly in a manner that has successfully secured funding for a variety of projects. There remains a need to communicate progress in achieving goals and recommended actions in a way that relates to stakeholder interests. In specific, the economic benefits of achieving oyster restoration goals needs to be demonstrated in meaningful and compelling ways. Opportunities for improvement in communications include engaging more diverse audiences in a way that invites people to participate or take action associated with the desired Blueprint outcomes.

Recommended Actions:

The following actions will help engage and diversify target audiences to increase support and engagement in achieving Blueprint goals and associated actions. Many of these actions support multiple Blueprint goals. These actions should consistently communicate a strategic vision and plan, and share progress and lessons learned with stakeholders, decision-makers and the general public. **The overall impact of the communications strategy is to build public and political support so that laws, regulations, funding, agency capacity and public engagement are sufficient to achieve Blueprint goals.**

- Review targeted audiences reached by past Blueprint communication efforts, and identify any new or changed priorities regarding audiences to reach with new Blueprint.
- Continue to engage a steering committee and continue the work of the two regional workgroups to identify, select, monitor, implement and evaluate restoration and communication strategies with key stakeholders. Annually review successes and failures of the communications strategy with steering committee.
- Create an editorial calendar that the steering committee and other stakeholders can review and contribute to monthly in order to properly encapsulate the work of all stakeholders in the Blueprint.
- Convene at least three steering committee meeting each year to coordinate the work of workgroups and other stakeholders.
- Hold at least two regional workgroup meetings each year to guide restoration efforts.
- Hold at least one technical workshop each year to encourage communication and partnership opportunities.

- Organize at one major public oyster summit every two years.
- Continually update website to include historic and current data on Blueprint goals and actions. Make website more visually appealing and organized, and so that it reflects work accomplished by all stakeholders involved. Make content relevant and up-to-date on a monthly basis. Publish updated links to shellfish maps on Blueprint website. Create a database of educational resources to be listed on the NCOysters.org website. Create quarterly Grower Profiles for website.
- Create social media accounts corresponding to the Blueprint and website.
- Produce the quarterly On the Half Shell digital newsletter with up to date and relevant content. Increase subscriber list to On the Half Shell by 50% at the end of 2025.
- Analyze monthly metrics on website, social media activity and digital newsletter visitation, and report findings to the steering committee at its meetings. Create monthly, incremental goals for viewership and engagement across platforms including: (1) three posts per month with at least 150 likes; (2) three interactive social media days per month like polls and Q&A; and (3) Increase website and newsletter traffic by 5% per month.
- Continue to produce an annual report on actions taken to carry-out Blueprint. Aim to have report ready prior to sessions of the N.C. General Assembly. Report on work accomplished in a way so that successes and failures can be identified and evaluated to help communicate lessons learned.
- Develop and distribute flyers and other appropriate published materials about Blueprint to restaurants, town centers (specifically coastal), public spaces, and event.
- Provide action steps for audiences in each post, event, newsletter, website update – for example, “learn more here” or “donate here.”
- Expand the use of the Oyster Trail as a communications tool to highlight the work of the Blueprint.
- Maintain and update annually a list of research needs and questions, and report annually on findings and answers related to that list.
- Consistently invite and engage lawmakers in activities related to the goals and actions in the Blueprint so they can see firsthand the results of their support.
- Devise a strategy to be reviewed by the steering committee for building broader public awareness that engages adults and students in actions of the Blueprint. This strategy needs to help broaden the level of community understanding and support to help advance this work. Parts of the strategy may include student engagement (i.e., develop premade modules for educators to use in the classroom, share existing modules with educators via NCOysters.org, create with interactive activities for children to be distributed at schools) or could seek to reach families and members of coastal communities through activities such as existing festivals, or special events accessible with low cost of admission and activities appealing to a wide range of audiences and age groups that will engage.

- Highlight Blueprint in working watermen publications, both print and online. Identify communications potentials with working watermen.
- Conduct periodic survey of stakeholders to help direct communications strategies so that they reflect the priority of target audiences and contain appropriate content and messaging.
- Work with stakeholders to create effective and consistent messaging campaigns that help advance the work of the Blueprint.