

Tools & Resources

Building a Trusted, Proactive
Network to Connect, Support and
Amplify Drought Messages

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Water does not

Follow political boundaries

Care about group or individual priorities

Worry about what's next

The Why of Your Drought Communication Network

- Aligns people and sectors as conditions evolve
- Defines “roles” within communications
- Addresses upstream / downstream dynamics
- Emphasizes relationship-driven coordination to build trust, enhance resilience and reduce conflict





Recognize Roles in Your Network

Audiences

Groups needing information

- Residents, businesses, elected leaders

Stakeholders

Those directly affected by drought decisions

- Water users, agricultural producers, water utilities

Partners

Help interpret, share information; may be trusted intermediary and collaborate with others

- Cooperative extension, conservation groups

Influencers

Shape opinions without formal authority

- Respected community voices, faith leader, association leader

Roles may overlap and individuals or groups may fit into more than one category.



Think About Your Downstream Neighbors

Uneven Watershed Impacts

Upstream decisions may delay or amplify downstream consequences

Downstream Vulnerabilities

Downstream areas may face different risks – e.g. ecological stress and economic losses

Inclusive Drought Planning

Facilitates early engagement downstream and builds trust among vulnerable communities.

Proactive Stewardship

Helps shift response from reactive to basin-wide proactive management.





Managing Your List

- Make water connections the priority not just geographic proximity
- Consider behavioral influence for effective engagement
- Assess timing of drought impacts (earlier or later) to tailor communication priorities
- Include stakeholders selectively to create a focused network, not an exhaustive list



Influencers – Tuning in to Trusted Voices



- Identify informal community influencers who are trusted during drought conditions
- Pay attention to who is consulted and whose opinions hold weight across sectors
- Bring influencers into your network early to help strengthen drought messaging and manage misinformation and resistance



Timing Your Engagement

Pre-Drought Prep

Focus on aligning trusted partners, setting expectations, and establishing a shared understanding.

Drought Watch

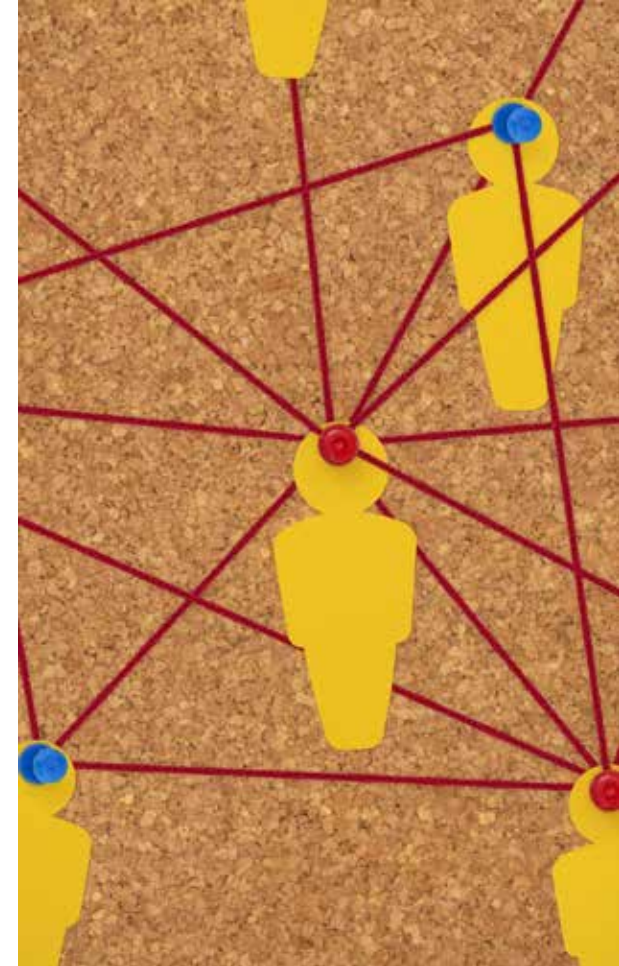
Expand engagement to sensitive sectors like aquaculture, recreation, and green industry during early drought signs.

Active Drought

Ensure consistent and coordinated messaging through influencers and partner agencies during active drought conditions.

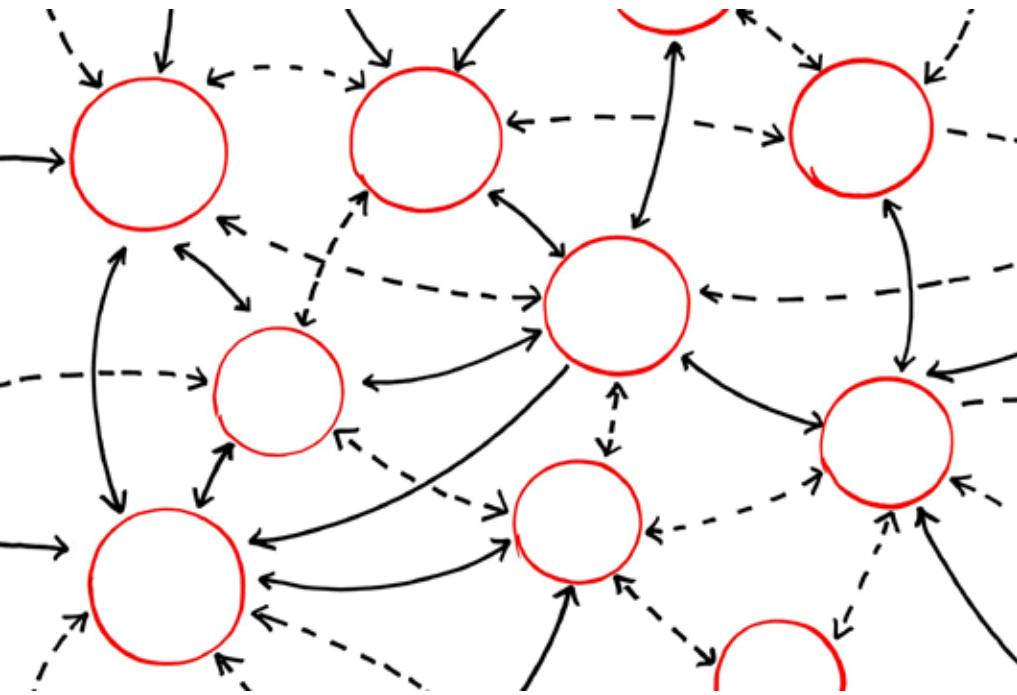
Recovery and Resilience

Focus on learning, documenting experiences, and strengthening resilience for future drought events.



The “Net” in Your Network

Engaging the right mix of technical expertise, local trust, and sector-specific knowledge



- Roles are interconnected in shaping how information is received, interpreted and acted on
- Plan pathways that reinforce each other
- Cross-sector coordination support consistency in messaging with room for flexibility
- Trusted local sources enhances communication effectiveness and community response.

Guiding Questions

- Does this group share a water source with us?
- Would this group feel drought impacts earlier or later than us?
- Do residents or others look to this group for guidance or reassurance?
- Could this group escalate if surprised by
- Can this group help translate technical information?



Final Thoughts: Build Trust Before Drought



- Early alignment of trusted messengers fosters shared understanding
- Visibility of downstream impacts improves upstream decision-making and stakeholder engagement

Final Thoughts: Build Trust Before Drought



- Proactive network building reduces conflict and supports resilient communities through shared roles and partnerships
- Drought communication is about people and focuses on their trust, experiences, and decision-making during uncertainty

Online List of Resources



<https://h2opolicycenter.org/projects/acf-waters-2026/droughtresources/>