

Proposal: Ann Arbor Water Rates Communication

The City of Ann Arbor (A2) recently concluded a Cost of Service (COS) study for its drinking water and wastewater rates. In order to gain support for the rate adjustment recommended under the COS, Hahn Public is honored to provide this proposal to develop and execute a public outreach campaign to educate customers and raise awareness of the issue. The issue of rates is a highly sensitive one that needs to be communicated very carefully so as to avoid public protest. Based on our experience and research on similar issues, we recommend taking the steps below to help ensure the success of the rate outreach campaign and strength public support in the long-run.

Approach:

One of the overarching themes from the water values survey is that Ann Arborites are willing to pay for their increased rates, they just need a strong justification, transparency and increased accountability from the City. Thus, the approach recommended for this campaign encapsulates all the values and principles that surfaced in the water values survey and our knowledge in water rates communication. Since Hahn Public is currently executing the stormwater outreach campaign, we recommend including the rates communication outreach into the overall process.

We recommend the project run from Mar. 2018 to Sept. 2018, executed in two phases of outreach:

I. Phase I: March – June 2018

Since the rate structure is going before Council in May 2018 we recommend simultaneously producing and releasing the creative designs and content within the month of March. Within March 2018 we will deliver the following:

1. Key messages – a document containing messaging for staff spokespeople to use during media interviews or public meetings.
2. Infographic I – an infographic on explaining the rate structure in simple terms with brief explanations where necessary.
3. Bill Insert – a simple yet attention-grabbing design that alerts residents of the new rate increase and how funds will be invested to improve and maintain water and wastewater infrastructure.
4. Creative campaign – a fully developed and fine-tuned campaign to raise awareness on the need for the rate increase and appreciation for the city and utility's expertise in ensuring high water quality in the City. Deliverables will include the campaign theme, look and feel, design assets and color palettes, so that AA can replicate and use as per their needs for future campaigns.

II. Phase II: May – September 2018

After the Council vote we will gather and apply the lessons learned toward the development of a well-thought out creative campaign. By May 2018 we will also have the results from the surveys and focus groups to help inform the creative campaign.

Scope of services and deliverables will be discussed in conjunction with existing stormwater outreach work.

Budget and Timeline

Please see separate attachment with budget and timeline.