

# Community Engagement



from the **TREE CITY USA®**  
**BULLETIN**

*No man is an island, and neither is anyone who wants to initiate or improve community forestry. Success today depends on collaboration and partnerships. Engaging others is essential for tree boards, city foresters, or any individual or group that champions the cause of tree planting and care.*

## The Theory of Engagement

Most advocates for urban forestry are action-oriented people. Conceptual ideas don't turn the crank! Actually planting trees or instructing others about things like tree preservation or hazard reduction are more to their liking. However, in order

to get entire communities engaged in what we know to be good urban forestry, an overview of some findings from social science may be helpful. Applying this or borrowing ideas from examples in the full bulletin will differ depending on your

circumstances. However, the concept of using engagement tools to advance a project, program, or plan can be employed by everyone from a city forester or commercial arborist to interested citizens with a passion for trees.

## ARTICULATE THE MESSAGING TRIANGLE

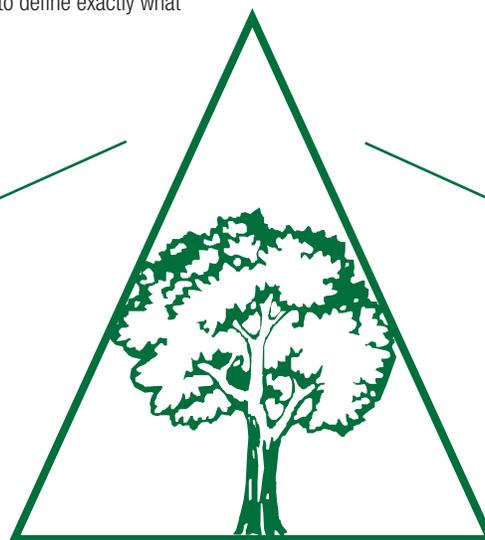
All action begins with an idea. Knowing in your own mind or within your organization what you want to achieve is one thing, and it is an important start. However, being able to clearly express it before you begin working on a campaign to achieve it will help ensure success. Paul Ries, Oregon's Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator, uses the Messaging Triangle to do this. In short, each side of the triangle is essential, so be able to define exactly what these are in your case.

**THE MESSAGE:**

What is your goal or your objectives?  
What is it you want to achieve?  
Write it down.

**Weak:** To improve urban forestry (Too general)

**Better:** To gain a Tree City USA award for my city or to obtain and plant trees where none exist on Sylvacated Ave.



**ALSO READ ABOUT:**

- A summary of suggestions from experience and research
- How to start a new urban forestry program
- Lots of examples from around the country

**POTENTIAL PARTNERS**  
(Strategic individuals or groups)

Brainstorm and make a list.  
(Omissions can lead to unintended offense.)

**Examples:**

- Garden Club
- Respected city council member
- Neighborhood associations
- Other environmental NGOs
- City official responsible for trees
- Scouts or youth organizations

**THE COMMUNICATION — DELIVERING THE MESSAGE**

Create a plan, including who will contact the potential partners, the best approach (phone, face-to-face, letters, email), an effective appeal (such as mutual benefits or the need for help), and a timetable.

Community engagement is a blend of social science and art. The science comes from sociology, political science, cultural anthropology, organizational development, psychology, social work, and other disciplines ... the equally important artistic element necessary to the process involves using understanding, skill, and sensitivity to apply and adapt the science in ways that fit the community and purposes of the engagement efforts.

– Centers for Disease Control and Prevention