**Communication Skills Information Sheet**

Communication is how we share information, ideas, and feelings. It is both verbal and non-verbal. It involves both listening and expressing. Clear communication is key to successful farm or ranch transfer. It helps landowners express their needs and motivations, helps incoming producers understand them, and vice versa. It also helps build respect and trust between stakeholders.

**The Basics**

Communication includes the person who is expressing themselves, the message they want to convey, and the people who receive it. *The message* is the information being shared. *Expressing* is the act of sharing it. *Listening* is the act of receiving it. This may sound simple, but communicating clearly takes time and effort.

Beyond exchanging information, communication includes the information being exchanged and many other things: Feelings and needs, expectations and bias, culture and power, personality and style all play roles. It is driven by how the messages are shared—verbally through speaking and writing, non-verbally through body language, and by the choice of delivery channels.

*Delivery channels* are all the various platforms and ways people share information. They include everything from kitchen table conversations to social media, legal documents and plans, phone calls, emails, texts, video calls, and so on.

We adapt our messages to both formal and informal situations. For example, we use formal verbal communication when meeting with a lawyer or a lender, and informal in conversations with family and friends. So too, in writing. We use it formally in business agreements and informally—even casually—in texts. Knowing when to use different types of communication depends on your audience, the kinds of messages you’re trying to convey, and why you want to convey them.

Listening is as important to clear communication as expressing is. *Active listening* requires giving someone else your full attention. It involves listening for meaning and to understand not just to respond. This leads to a more complete understanding of a situation or another person’s point of view and helps build trust, resolve conflicts, and make well-informed decisions.

. **Tips for Effective Expression**

* *Speaking:* Pay attention to your pitch, tempo, and tone.
* *Writing:* Edit and proofread for format, spelling, and grammar.
* *Body language:* Be aware of your gestures, facial expressions, and body position, as well as the body language of the other person or people you are communicating with.
* *Delivery Channel:* Consider what channel is most effective for your audience and the type of information you want to share.

More tips to help you express yourself clearly:

* *Know Thyself:*Consider your communication style, its strengths and weaknesses, and how you come across to others so you can adapt and improve your expression to reach different audiences. Understanding your own style also helps you understand other people’s. A variety of sources can help you assess your style and preferences:
  + [DiSC Profiles](https://www.discprofiles.com/)
  + [MBTI online](https://www.mbtionline.com/en-US/Products/For-you?gclid=CjwKCAjwp4m0BhBAEiwAsdc4aP4uRVQ2xetpnJvOmjnvENfwxEDf0vWuCclnz6piYEGjW617Q6ALZBoCndQQAvD_BwE) or [Personal Style Inventory\_Myers Briggs](https://ugc.futurelearn.com/uploads/files/06/ba/06bab3f7-b810-474d-acb5-2427532001da/Personal_Style_Inventory_based_on_Myers_Briggs.pdf)
  + [Personal Social Styles](https://www.iths.org/wp-content/uploads/PSI_Report-Handout.pdf)
  + [True Colors Personality Assessment](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/WC234)
  + [16personalities.com](https://www.16personalities.com/)
* *Identify your audience:*Consider who you are communicating with and why. What do you know about their personality, culture, style and preferences? How do they communicate? Find common ground.

Farm transfer often includes people of different generations and delivery channels have evolved dramatically. In 1920, about 35% of US households had telephones. By 2020, over 80% had Smartphones. While you may prefer in person meetings and phone calls, the incoming producer may rely on texting and digital channels. See [Communicating Across Generations Information Sheet.docx](https://americanfarmlandtrust-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/jfreedgood_farmland_org/EVR7udhlAWBKtpqHT9WkPjsBJ9S1E5wYmHIojbtllqlZKA?e=ZSBnn1)

* *Choose the right channel:* The delivery channel should reflect the communication preferences of your audience as well as your own. It also should match the purpose of the communication. For example, if you are confirming a meeting time or place, a quick text may be appropriate. If you anticipate a difficult conversation, consider meeting in a neutral location, possibly with an impartial advisor.
* *Employ Simple and Clear Language*:  Use active language, simple and specific words, and avoid jargon. Active language puts you in front of the action. For example: “I signed the papers” instead of “The papers were signed by me.”
* *Prepare what you want to say:* Think before you speak—or write, even something as simple as a text. Make sure you are clear about the messages you want to express. You might jot down some bullet points, draft a script, letter, proposal, or email. For formal writing and presentations, start with an outline which includes topic sentences for the main points you want to make.
* *Proofread or Practice:* If you are making a pitch, negotiating terms, or making a presentation, it is a good idea to practice. You can practice in front of a mirror, time yourself, and/or ask someone to listen to you and give you feedback.

When you write something, edit your work for grammar and style. Proofread and don’t rely on spell check. Consider the channel: Writing for a digital media is different from a formal document or a business plan. As a rule, choose simple fonts that are large enough for your audience to read, and allow plenty of white space on the page.

* *Use “I messages”:* When speaking,“I messages” or “I statements” focus attention on the person expressing the message instead of on the person receiving it. Saying “I want/need/feel/believe” vs. “you do or don’t this or that, or you make me feel…” helps you express yourself without making the listener defensive. This helps build stronger relationships, avoid conflicts, and de-escalate tense situations.
* *Show appreciation:* Acknowledging others and expressing appreciation and gratitude are signs of respect. Combined with keeping small agreements, these help build empathy and trust, reducing conflict and stress and leading to more positive outcomes.
* *Pay attention to body language:* Farmers and ranchers often are experts in non-verbal communication because they work alongside each other and with animals, watching and observing often without using words. Even so, you may be unaware of how much you express through body language. Do you nod your head to signal that you’re listening? Do you gesture with your hands while you talk? Do you lean forward or tend to lean back in a conversation?

**Tips for Listening**

* *Active listening:* Give others your full attention.
* *Listen for meaning:* Beyond their actual words, consider what other person is trying to express.
* *Body language:* Be aware of what others are expressing through body language and well as what you are expressing through yours. Keep in mind that the norms of non-verbal communication vary based on culture, generation, and gender.

More tips to listen for meaning:

* *Be Present:* Paying attention to what the other person is trying to say takes focus and intention. Quiet your own thoughts. Don’t start preparing a response until the other person has finished speaking. While listening to their words, also listen to non-verbal cues like the rhythm and tones they are using and their body language.
* *Show Interest:* To indicate you are paying attention and listening to what others are saying, you can nod your head and look at them when they speak—but do not stare! Ask clarifying questions and encourage dialogue.
* *Pay Attention to Intention and Meaning*: Listen for the meaning behind the words, do not focus on the words themselves. Absorb what the other person is really trying to say. Discard any preconceived notions about what you think they are going to say.
* *Reflect Back What You Hear:* You can summarize what think you’ve heard by saying things like “Sounds like what you’re saying is….” or “What I hear you say is ... “ or “I like your idea to ... “ Ask them to explain anything you don’t understand and be sure to withhold advice and judgment to signal your willingness to receive the other person’s perspective.