

Communications & Engagement Guide

for Catchment Community Groups



Why tell your story?

Every catchment group has a unique story worth sharing. Telling your story helps people understand the challenges you face, the work you're doing, and the difference it makes for your community and environment. A well-told story builds pride, connection, momentum and inspires others to join in.

Telling your story helps you:

- Raise awareness of catchment issues and challenges.
- Celebrate successes and attract new members and funding.
- Keep current members engaged and motivated.
- Show funders and partners the impact of your mahi.
- Build trust, credibility, and social licence.

The Communications Plan

A communications plan keeps your group focused and consistent. Instead of rushing out ad-hoc messages, it helps you set clear goals, identify your audience, and choose the best ways to reach them. With a simple plan, your communications become more strategic, effective, and easier to manage — saving time while achieving more impact.

Setting goals

Before you start, ask: What are we trying to achieve by sharing our story?

Common goals include:

- Growing awareness of the group's mission.
- Getting more people to events or working bees.
- Attracting new volunteers or members.
- Increasing newsletter sign-ups.
- Building relationships with funders and councils.
- Sharing knowledge and good practice.

Know your audience

Who do you need to reach?

- **Demographics:** age, location, occupation.
- **Interests/values:** nature, farming, sustainability, community pride.
- **Behaviours:** where they spend time (online or offline), how they get information, who do they listen to?

Think about:

- What do we want them to know?
- What do we want them to do?



Communications Plan Template

Key messages

These are the big ideas you want people to remember.

For example:

- “We’re locals caring for our awa and whenua.”
- “Small actions add up to big change.”
- “Together, we can leave the land and water in better shape for the next generation.”

Tips for effective messages:

- Think about why you are communicating - for what purpose,
- Clear, personal, heartfelt - how do you want them to feel?
- Focused on community impact and achievements.
- Positive, authentic, and aligned with your goals.
- Include call to actions - what should people do next?

Resources



[Messages for ‘Yes’](#)



[The Pyramid of Engagement](#)



Rangitikei Rivers Catchment Collective's sign clearly communicates their key message.



Roles & responsibilities

- Be realistic about how much time and budget you can commit.
- Decide who will post on social media, send newsletters, or talk to the media.
- Write down what needs approval (e.g. funding news)
- Agree on a “tone of voice”: friendly, respectful, and no shaming.
- Make a simple “do’s and don’ts” list (e.g. do post event photos, don’t share personal addresses).

Consider:

- Who is responsible for comms?
- What skills and time are available?
- Can you access funding for comms/admin support?

Choosing your channels

You don’t need to be everywhere.

Pick a mix that fits your audience:

- **Face-to-face:** events, workshops, planting days.
- **Print:** flyers, posters, local papers.
- **Online:** Facebook, newsletters, website, group messenger apps

A few well-managed channels are better than many left empty.

Newsletters

Why use them?

- Cost-effective way to keep members informed.
- Great for sharing updates, events, and stories.
- Builds a valuable database of supporters.

Best practice

- Send monthly or quarterly.
- Use Mailchimp and/or Canva.
- Make it mobile-friendly and easy to share.
- Include visuals, links, and clear calls to action.

Content ideas

- Event recaps and upcoming dates.
- Volunteer spotlights.
- Project milestones.
- Partner news and funding updates.

Resources



[Mailchimp Guide](#)



[Canva Newsletter Template](#)



Communities taking charge thanks to citizen science tools

Environment

John Hart

In Wairarapa, local communities are discovering that knowledge is power when it comes to protecting their waterways. With water quality directly affecting both the environment and agriculture, understanding the health of these water systems has become crucial for catchment groups in the region.

Through citizen science and innovative monitoring methods, catchment communities are taking charge of the future of their local waterways.

For Wairarapa's catchment communities, keeping track of water quality is one of the most important tools to assess potential issues and monitor progress. While community activities can be diverse, water quality testing remains central to their efforts.

Being part of a catchment community means thinking beyond your own farm boundaries. Water doesn't stop flowing at the edge of a farm or even a catchment.

The waterways across Wairarapa are interconnected, and we need to approach them with a catchment-wide perspective.

When you hear "water testing", you might think of a sample sent to a laboratory in a bottle for testing. It's a useful tool, but is often costly and dependent on outside expertise. Another monitoring tool gaining popularity with communities is what's known as a SHMAK, or stream health mon-



The Mountains to Sea Wellington Catchment Restoration and Science team helped identify a native fish with the Wakamoekau Catchment Group.

itoring and assessment kit. It allows locals to monitor water quality themselves, providing scientifically reliable results while fostering a deeper connection to the water.

National organisations, such as the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research and Greater Wellington Regional Council, are supporting these community efforts. Together, they've

developed a quality assurance framework to ensure that citizen science data is used effectively.

A new app has also been introduced, enabling communities to input monitoring data directly in the field.

For a more high tech approach, eDNA (environmental DNA) testing is becoming the go-to for precision monitoring. This

method involves sending a water sample for analysis to identify plant and animal species living in the water upstream.

Greater Wellington Regional Council will expand eDNA sampling to 17 new sites along the Wairarapa coast this year.

Over the past year, our catchment communities have conducted water temperature and stream health assessments across different monitoring sites with our partners at Mountains to Sea Wellington, part of the wider Wai Connection project.

This initiative, funded through the Essential Freshwater Fund, has enabled communities to track their water quality and make evidence-based decisions about how to improve it.

Monitoring the health of their waterways and being able to share the story of their progress is a huge part of their catchment group journey.

The success of these efforts highlights the power of community-driven monitoring. By combining traditional methods with new technologies through collaboration, innovation, and local action, Wairarapa catchment communities are demonstrating how local knowledge and data drive positive environmental change and safeguard their natural resources.

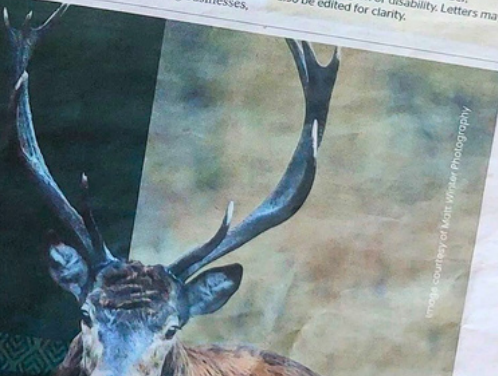
If you'd like to know more, get in touch with the team at Wairarapa Catchment Collective via wairarapacc.co.nz.

John Hart is partnership lead for the Wairarapa Catchment Collective.

Be extra sure this Roar

Identify your target beyond all doubt. Whether you're using optical or thermal imaging devices, if in doubt, don't shoot!

PLAN safe } ACT safe } STAY safe



Working with media

Why it matters

- Free exposure to wider audiences.
- Builds credibility and public awareness.
- Helps attract funding and support.

Media release tips

- Strong headline and sub-headline.
- Put key info in the first two paragraphs.
- Cover the 5 Ws: Who, What, Where, When, Why.
- Include quotes from spokespeople.
- Add contact details + high-quality landscape photos (1MB+, 1-2 people max).

Make it easier for journalists

- Provide clear, compelling stories.
- Include visuals and access to spokespeople.
- Be persistent and build relationships.

Resources



[Media Release Template](#)

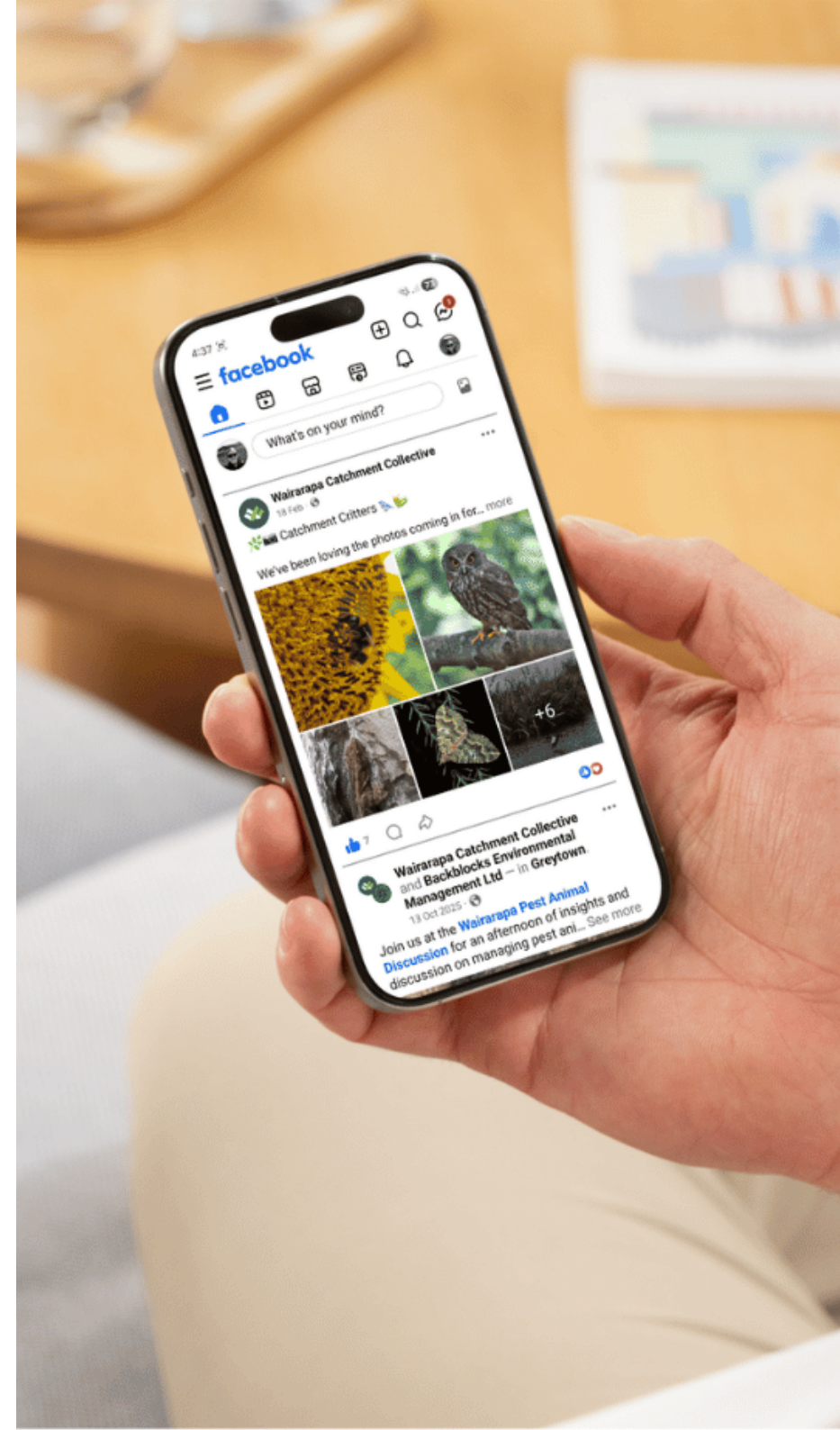
Social Media

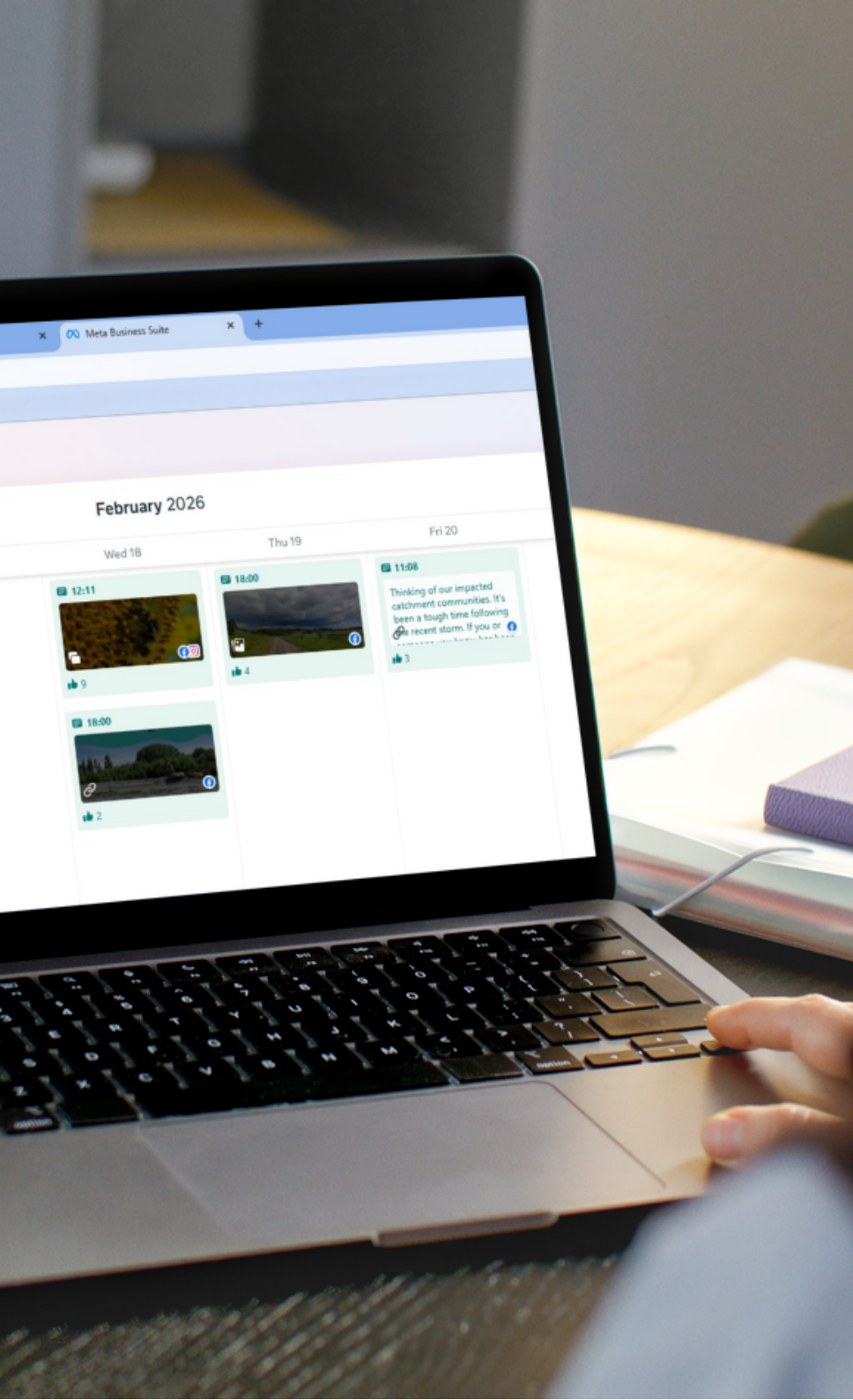
Why use social media?

- Meet people where they already are.
- Raise the profile of your group.
- Attract and organise volunteers.
- Share stories, photos, and wins.
- Advocate for your local environment.

Best practice tips

- Post consistently (1-2 times per week is enough).
- Use good-quality photos or short videos – people love faces and action shots.
- Start with a question, statistic, or fun fact.
- Keep captions short, conversational, and positive.
- Include a clear call to action (e.g. “Join us this Saturday at...”).
- Tag partners and use relevant hashtags.
- Respond to comments – thank people and answer questions.
- Share relevant posts from others (DOC, Predator Free NZ, councils, local schools).





Tools and planning

- **Content calendar** – plan posts around events and seasons.
- **Scheduling tools** – Meta Business Suite, Hootsuite.
- **Canva** – simple graphics, infographics, and templates.
- **Photo library** – build a folder of reusable images.
- **Batching** – prepare content in advance to save time.

What works well online

- Milestones: “Our 500th native planted!”
- Before & after restoration shots.
- Volunteer spotlights with quotes.
- Infographics of trapping/planting statistics.
- Short video reels from events.
- Tying into national days (e.g. World Wetlands Day)

Resources



[Social Media Content Themes](#)



[Content Calendar Template](#)

Group Engagement

Why it matters

Getting people to turn up once is easy. Keeping them coming back and enjoying it is the real win.

Welcoming new members

- Simple welcome pack (what the group does, who to contact).
- Pair newcomers with a friendly face.
- Make sure they feel useful from day one.

Recognition and thanks

- Celebrate milestones – group and individual.
- Public shout-outs in newsletters and online.
- Branded gear to build group identity: T-shirts, stickers, mugs.
- Share stories of individual impact.

Make it fun!

- Emphasise the social side: morning tea, BBQs, shared kai.
- Highlight benefits: time in nature, fitness, learning, connection.
- Run competitions (e.g. most pests trapped, best photo).
- Involve family with kid-friendly tasks.





Show the impact

- Share stats: trees planted, pests caught, km of awa fenced.
- Use photos and infographics.
- Tell stories of biodiversity or water quality improvements.

Offer different ways to help

Not everyone can dig holes!

Other roles include:

- Admin and record-keeping.
- Fundraising and sponsorship.
- Communications and social media.
- Education and outreach.
- Backyard trapping or planting.

Long term engagement

- Stay in touch via newsletters and social media.
- Build traditions (annual planting day, Christmas BBQ).
- Create pathways for volunteers to grow into leaders.
- Ask for feedback and adapt.
- Have a succession plan for retiring volunteers.

References



[Effective Catchment Communications Guide - Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust](#)

[An Introduction to Communications Webinar - Bay Conservation Alliance and Conservation Amplified](#)

[How to Kill Rats and Engage a Community - Predator Free Miramar](#)

[Social Media Marketing Strategies For The Environmental Services Sector - Australia River Restoration Centre](#)

[Getting Started on Social Media - A guide for Landcare Networks](#)

[Communication Tips for Community Groups - Predator Free NZ](#)

[Introduction to Communications - CommunityNet Aotearoa](#)

[Engaging Communities with Social Media Webinar - Predator Free NZ](#)

[How to Engage Volunteers - Predator Free NZ](#)

[What Keeps Conservation Volunteers Committed? - Predator Free NZ](#)

[Communications toolkit for Environmental Volunteering Groups and Landcarers](#)

[Enabling Change: Tools for Practitioners](#)