

Information Hotline

Engagement range	Inform
Difficulty level	Medium
Cost	Medium (\$1,000 to \$10,000)
When might you use it	To showcase product, plan, policy To discover community issues To communicate an issue
Number of people required to help to organise	A team of people may be required (3- 12)
Time to organise	Medium (six weeks to six months)
Size of audience	Large (over 30)
Issues/resources to think about	Staff; Comfortable workroom with desks, telephones, and computer access for recording contacts, tracking updated information, and contacting expert; sources; Polite, brief, up-to-date recorded; message giving details of the project, proposal or issue, and inviting further enquiries; detail about where to go for further information.
Innovation level	Low

Description

An information hotline offers pre-recorded information on a project via the telephone and/or access to project team staff members who can answer questions or provide additional information and assistance.

Objective

- To deliver accurate, consistent information over the telephone to those who wish or need to know about an issue or event.

Desired Outcome

- Can ensure that those who need to know are informed quickly, easily and efficiently (e.g. at times of a natural disaster when relatives want to know the whereabouts and safety of their family members).

Uses/Strengths

- Offers an inexpensive and simple device for publicity, information and public input.
- Provides a good service to the public by preventing people 'doing the run around' to access project information.
- Can serve as a link between the citizens and the municipality's government.
- It is easy to provide updates on project activities.
- Can describe ways the community can become involved.
- Can offer a report-in point for volunteers who act as extra observers in reporting on events (e.g. pollution, litter, beached whales, etc).
- Offers a reasonably low-cost for set up and updates.
- Portrays an image of 'accessibility' for an organisation, department or group.
- Can be an avenue for citizens to feel more involved in their community.
- It also can be a great way to catch illegal polluters or to stop accidental spills that might otherwise go unnoticed (e.g. people may feel more comfortable to 'dob in' a polluter when they are speaking to the people responsible for monitoring such activities via the relatively anonymous hotline, whereas they would not do this in person, or if they had to write a letter).

Special Considerations/Weaknesses

- Must be adequately advertised to be successful.
- If staffed by volunteers, can be time consuming.
- Works best if you can afford to set up an easy-to-remember phone number.
- Designated contact must have sufficient knowledge of the project to be able to answer questions quickly and accurately.
- May limit a project officer from performing other tasks.

Step by Step Guide

1. Determine the information to be recorded and timetable of updates to the service (if applicable).
2. Plan for advertising the number, which may include having stationery and flyers printed, or a stamp with the hotline number that can be stamped onto all outgoing printed correspondence or promotional material.
3. Set up a hotline number for callers by recording message and hooking up to the phone line. Record information that will answer the most commonly asked questions.
4. Set up a toll free number for non-local callers.

5. Advertise the number in the media, and ensure it is on all your outreach material.
6. Offer the option of being put through to a specific person for more details.
7. Appoint staff to answer questions.
8. Brief and train the person nominated to ensure they can access all information, have contact details of who to ask for information on specific aspects of the project, and have a pleasant telephone manner, even with difficult callers.
9. Record calls/common complaints/concerns in telephone journal for your records and input to the participation process.