

# Persistent Communication to Homeowners

## Climate Communications Case Story



Carrots and Sticks



Personalization



Positive Framing

### PROJECT AT-A-GLANCE

**Project Title:** Persistent Communication to Homeowners

**Location:** Québec City, Québec

**Project Partners:** Québec City Urban Infrastructure Department, Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction (ICLR)

**Date:** 2005 to 2008

**Climate Issue:** Flooding

**Action Area:** Stormwater management and flood risk reduction

**Behavioural Theme(s):** Carrots and Sticks, Personalization, Positive Framing

**Audience:** Local homeowners



*It is important to start by promoting citizens' participation instead of presenting the program as a constraint.*

*— Manuel Parent, Urban Infrastructure Engineer for Quebec City<sup>23</sup>*

## IMPACT STORY

The neighbourhood of Maizerets in Québec City faced significant challenges related to basement flooding due to its topography and outdated combined sewer system. Many homes had gutters connected directly to the foundation drain, which fed into the sewer system, overloading it during rainfall. This issue was particularly problematic in the lower-lying area of the neighbourhood, where stormwater accumulation led to frequent flooding, especially during extreme rainfall events. To address this, Québec City initiated a project to fund downspout disconnections in order to mitigate flooding. This was done through targeted infrastructure improvements and homeowner engagement that emphasized effective communications and incentives.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES INCLUDE...

- Reducing basement flooding;
- Updating stormwater management infrastructure; and
- Increasing homeowner participation in retrofit programs.

## COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- **Targeted Letters:** The city sent a series of timed letters that explained the importance of the retrofit program, offered to cover the full costs of the retrofit, emphasized that the program was mandatory, and warned homeowners about potential fines for non-compliance.
- **Brochures:** Detailed explanations and visual aids were provided in brochure format which helped homeowners understand the necessity and benefits of the retrofit program.

## BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES & TAKEAWAYS

- **Carrots and Sticks:** The city offered to cover the full cost of retrofits and even provide a free rain barrel as incentives to participate in the retrofit program. In addition, they also introduced fines for non-compliance, emphasizing the mandatory nature of the program. Consistent communications nudged homeowners to commit to the program to avoid fines and reap the benefits.
- **Personalization:** Personally addressed letters were sent to homeowners as part of a targeted communication effort.
- **Positive Framing:** Initial communications emphasized program incentives and benefits, highlighting the positive outcomes of taking action.



## CONCLUSION

The City of Quebec's approach demonstrates the critical role of strategic targeted communication, incentives, as well as penalties to get residents to take action. Ultimately, the city achieved 100% compliance in the targeted neighbourhood. The retrofit program successfully incentivized homeowners to disconnect their downspouts to reduce flooding and increase climate resilience more broadly.

## SOURCE

Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction. (2018). *Cities adapt: Rainfall in Quebec City*. [https://www.iclr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/cities\\_adapt\\_rainfall\\_quebec\\_city.pdf](https://www.iclr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/cities_adapt_rainfall_quebec_city.pdf)

## MORE CASE STORIES AND RESOURCES ONLINE

This case story was developed by ICLEI Canada through the Ontario Resource Centre for Climate Adaptation (ORCCA) as part of a Climate Communications Toolkit. Find more case stories and additional climate communications resources online at [icleicanada.org/project/climate-communications-toolkit](https://icleicanada.org/project/climate-communications-toolkit)

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