Communicate What Is Learned

Population health approaches look at populations and communities as a whole to find broader, comprehensive solutions to problems.

To help build this approach it is vital that partners who have successfully met challenges share their experiences and findings.

How to start
Define your audience

First, think of the audience(s) who would benefit from your information. Possible audiences include:

- Peers who may be working on similar population health initiatives.
- Local governments, schools, hospitals or community organizations that may want to partner or build on your project, or may be impacted by it.
- Legislators or the public who may be interested in the success of your initiative.

Consider your audience’s current understanding of the topic when developing any communications product. Try to anticipate and answer their questions as you develop your messaging. Give readers the information they need to easily understand your key points.

- Don’t assume every audience is starting from the same place in their understanding of the topic. What background information will help clarify your message(s)?
- Why should they care? Always find the “why” for your specific audience when developing your message(s).
- Don’t use a one size fits all approach to developing outreach or information materials.

Are you writing at a level your audience will easily understand? Don’t let jargon and unnecessary technical terms come between your message and your audience.

Define your purpose

Once you’ve defined primary and secondary audiences, think about what you want those audience(s) to KNOW, THINK or DO as a result of your communication effort. Are you:
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- Sharing a best practice?
- Asking for assistance?
- Trying to engage potential partners?
- Sharing success stories?

Each of these goals may require a different type of communications approach. For example, a press release may be a good way to broadly share a success story but won’t necessarily help peers understand how to use your best practice in their own communities.

Along with defining the action you want (**know, think, do**) ask:

- What is the timeframe for communication? (Immediate? Long-term?)
- What internal/external partners need to be engaged; at what level?
  - Did other partners help with this initiative? Have you asked them how they want to be involved in sharing the results?
- What other information is needed about this issue; who has it?

Defining your audience(s) and purpose for will help you decide:

- Best type of communication product.
  - Make sure your planned product meets your overall goals. You may need to use a combination of products if your goals are multi-layered.
- Best communication channel.
  - Use the channels your target audience uses. For example, don’t use social media if your target audience doesn’t use it.

If your message is controversial or complex, plan an interactive or in-person approach that allows your audience to ask real-time questions or give immediate feedback.

**Accessibility**

Make sure to consider your audience’s needs when planning your outreach. Accessibility considerations include:

**Language** – both translation into languages other than English and the clarity of the message (including using a level of technical terms that meets the audience’s knowledge base).
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Cultural competency – are you using the right type of communications product and the right channel for your specific audience? Are you thinking about what it most important to your audience group, and addressing their concerns in your message? Are you communicating in a way that models respect for your audience by understanding how you can enhance their understanding of a topic through in-person outreach, use of graphics or other strategies? If you have written materials translated, have you built in time to assure you can have the translations double-checked?

For more information:

- **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act:** communications products and initiatives must comply with Title VI which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin. Past U.S. Supreme Court decisions ruled that discrimination against people with limited English proficiency (LEP) is a form of discrimination by national origin.

- **Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services standards (CLAS):** communications products and initiatives must comply with CLAS standards.

**ADA compliance** – Communications products and initiatives (including choosing event venues) must comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Basic ADA requirements include:

- **Website accessibility** - Designing for accessibility means considering issues impacting assistive technologies (tools which help people with visual or other impairments access the Web).

- **Accessibility information** - All interested people, including those with impaired vision or hearing, must be able to obtain information about the availability and location of accessible services, activities and facilities.

- **Alternate format** - Upon request, all documents must be made available in alternate formats such as audio file, large print or Braille.

**Nondiscriminatory content** - Publications must avoid language or images that stigmatize people with disabilities.

**Plain Talk**

Writing in “plain talk” doesn’t mean dumbing down your materials; it actually means we have the expertise to simply and effectively explain complex topics to a broad audience. It’s a way to:
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- Respect your audience.
- Remove potential roadblocks between your audience and your message.
- Invite your audience to focus on the key points rather than struggle with new terminology.

Help your audience understand your key messages:

- Don’t use jargon; our audience should not need to learn a new language in order to access information.
- Use short sentences.
- Write in active voice instead of passive.
  - Passive - *It is the intention of this program to provide timely information.*
  - Active - *This program works to provide timely information.*
  - Don’t use words or sentence constructions that cause confusion, such as:
    - Undefined abbreviations or acronyms.
    - Different terms for the same thing (referring to something as a "project" in one sentence and a "program" in the next).
    - Strings of nouns forming complex constructions (*example*: "factor analysis data research tools").

Edit out bureaucratic language

Here are a few common bureaucratic words and their *plain talk* replacements.

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**Communication Methods**

Once you’ve determined your audience(s) and purpose, you can plan the best methods to communicate about your population health initiative. Here are some approaches to consider:

**Publish your findings**

- General public
  - A press release is a good way to get your findings out to the general public, and to give partners and decision makers a brief overview of the methods, successes and challenges of your population health project. Complement the press release with social media posts, emails to partners, and other communications that help spread the word. (If you want to share in-depth information with peers, pair your press release with one of the recommended peer communication methods below.)
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- **Peers**
  - An article in a peer-reviewed journal allows you to share in-depth information with a key audience. It may also help you build credibility for your population health strategies, and encourage others to use them.

- **Legislators**
  - Sharing success stories with legislators can encourage continued funding for population health strategies. Keep in mind that the best voices to share those successes are often community members who have benefited. For examples of success stories, explore the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s Community Health Success Stories.

**Peer Learning**

- Conference calls, webinars and in-person meetings with organizations that are engaging or just starting to engage in population health strategies can be good opportunities to share best practices and talk through successes and challenges. If your initiative was complex or controversial, consider engaging a skilled facilitator.

- Look for ways to electronically share resources, articles, best practices, successes, and challenges with peers and partners. Some ideas include a blog, email list, and joining community groups in MyPortal.

**Presentations**

- Presenting your findings at conferences raises your profile and adds credibility to your work. It also gives you the opportunity to connect with others who are doing population health work.

Don’t forget about the communities that you worked with for your intervention. Community presentations help you share findings with current partners and connect with new partners to build program sustainability.

**Challenges**

Challenge: Our organization or agency doesn’t have the staff, time, or resources for effective communications.
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**Try:** Building time and resources for communications into grant applications is a good preventive step to take. If that has not been done and staff time and resources are limited, plan a simple strategy to get your information out.

There are many resources available online to help with communications planning. There are also ways to get your information out without planning an entire campaign or writing an article. See the methods outlined in the sections above.

You might also try offering a communication position as an internship at local universities and have a student help to create communication materials.

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**Challenge: Subject matter experts and communications staff have a hard time coming to agreement over the language that should be in our materials.**

**Try:** The audience’s knowledge of your topic should decide the level of information used in materials. Don’t let technical terms and jargon stop your audience from understanding your information. See the sections above on Accessibility and Plain Talk for suggestions.

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**Challenge: Staff and partners complain that they don’t get the information they need in format that works for them.**

**Try:** When creating a communication plan, think through the audiences you want to reach, what content each may need, and the best ways to reach them with that information.

- **Partners with limited time?** Post information on a website so they can review on their own schedule.

- **Clinicians with hectic schedules?** See if you can do a short presentation early in the morning, at lunch or after clinic hours. Or, see if you can present at a meeting that’s already scheduled.

- **Partners from different organizations?** Consider speaking/having a poster presentation at a conference attended by your key audience groups. Or, host a webinar that will also be recorded and posted online.
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Health Equity

- **Understand your audience.** If you are not from the community that you are trying to reach, talk to community members about their trusted sources for information. Make sure you share information in culturally appropriate ways by testing materials with community members.

- **Stay connected to communities.** If you’ve implemented a program in a community, it is vital to stay connected, accountable, and continue to build relationships. Share with community members how information they provided was used. Work with the community on ways to sustain the program.

- **Share your experiences when interventions didn’t work.** There can be missteps when organizations and agencies work in community. If something doesn’t work, it’s important to share lessons learned to help other programs succeed.

See the *Accessibility* section above for more ideas.

Communication Resources


- [Communicating with the Media: How to Elevate Your Success](https://www.preventioninstitute.org/communications/communicating-with-the-media-how-to-elevate-your-success), Prevention Institute

- [Community Tool Box, Chapter 4 Section 5: Community Presentations](https://www.communitytoolbox.com/health/healthpromotion/communtpresentations.aspx), Center for Community Health and Development

- [Community Tool Box, Chapter 6 Section 3: Preparing Press Releases](https://www.communitytoolbox.com/communications/pressreleases.aspx), Center for Community Health and Development

- [Community Tool Box, Chapter 16: Group Facilitation and Problem Solving](https://www.communitytoolbox.com/communications/groupfacilitation/probsolving.aspx), Center for Community Health and Development