

FLEXED

Virtual Community (VC)

Learning Series:

Building & Strengthening

Communication

Partnerships



Workbook

Facilitator's Guide

Welcome!



Introduction: Why This Workshop Matters

Effective outbreak response doesn't begin when cases are identified - it begins with the relationships we build today.

This 90-minute workshop guides your epidemiology team through a systematic process for identifying, assessing, and strengthening the communication partnerships essential for surveillance and outbreak investigations.

The goal with the workbook exercises is proactive relationship building, not crisis response.

By establishing strong communication channels before an outbreak occurs, your team will be better positioned to act quickly, coordinate effectively, and protect community health when it matters most.

As facilitator, your role is to guide participants through self-reflection and practical planning. This isn't about prescribing solutions - it's about helping each team member think critically, assess their current partnerships, identify gaps, and commit to actionable next steps.

The workbook provides the structure; your facilitation creates the space for honest assessment and meaningful planning.

Facilitator's Overview

Time Required for this Workshop: 90 minutes

Materials Needed:

- One workbook per participant
- Pens/pencils (if onsite)
- Optional: Easel chart or whiteboard
- Timer or clock



Facilitator Preparation:

- Review the entire workbook before the session
- Consider preparing 1-2 examples from your own jurisdiction to illustrate each of the concepts
- Identify whether any partnerships are currently problematic and may need sensitive handling or extra attention.

Tips for Success

1. **Pace intentionally:** Don't rush the reflection sections. Silence means thinking is happening.
2. **Normalize imperfect partnerships:** Many LHDs have gaps - that's why this workshop exists.
3. **Encourage specificity:** Vague goals like "communicate better" become concrete actions like "schedule quarterly coffee meetings."
4. **Model vulnerability:** If appropriate, briefly share a partnership challenge you've faced.
5. **End with accountability:** Consider scheduling a 30-day follow-up meeting to check progress on commitments.

The workbook is a tool participants can revisit for additional partnerships. Today's workshop focuses on getting ONE partnership strengthened - that success builds momentum for others.

Section-by-Section Facilitator's Guide

Opening Reflection (5 minutes) - workbook (WB) Page 3

- Have participants silently reflect and write their biggest communication challenges with partners
- Optional: Invite 2-3 volunteers to share (validates common struggles)
- Transition: "Today we'll build a practical plan to address that will help address and even prevent these challenges"



Steps 1-2: Setting the Foundation (10 minutes) - WB Pages 5-6

- Briefly explain that everyone will work through the same process but may focus on different outbreak types
- Have participants check applicable roles and select their outbreak focus
- **Facilitator tip: Emphasize there's no "right" choice - pick what's most relevant to their work**



Step 3: Partner Identification (15 minutes) - WB Page 7

- Explain the three partner categories (internal, external direct, external indirect)
- Give participants 10 minutes to brainstorm and list 3 partners
- Discussion prompt: "Notice how many partners are needed for effective outbreak response"
- Encourage thinking beyond the "usual suspects"

Section-by-Section Facilitator's Guide

Step 4: Priority Partner Selection (10 minutes) - WB Pages 8-9

- Guide participants to select ONE priority partner for deep focus
- Key message: "We can't strengthen all partnerships at once. Starting with one creates momentum"
- Have them complete both the partner identification and communication types sections

Step 5: Communication Level Assessment (8 minutes)-WB Page 10



- Explain the color-coded system (Green → Yellow → Orange → Red)
- Participants assess what level they NEED with their priority partner
- Facilitator note: This often reveals important gaps between "nice to have" and "mission critical"

Steps 6-8: Current State Assessment (15 minutes) - WB Pages 11-12

- These three steps work together as a communication audit for that partnership
- Give participants focused time to honestly assess:
 - Current communication frequency (Step 6)
 - What's working well (Step 7)
 - What's missing or needs improvement (Step 8)



Facilitator tip: Encourage honesty - gaps are opportunities, not failures

Section-by-Section Facilitator's Guide

Step 9: Mutual Value Proposition (12 minutes) - WB Pages 13-14

- Critical section: This shifts from "what we need" to "mutual benefit"
- Guide participants through both perspectives:
 - What you need from the partner
 - What the partner needs from you
- Have them draft their mutual value proposal using the template



Key insight: Strong partnerships require understanding both sides' needs

Step 10: First Contact Strategy (10 minutes) - WB Pages 15-16

- Participants identify whether they have "warm" or "cold" introduction options
- Guide them to draft their 30-second elevator pitch
- Facilitator tip: If time allows, have pairs practice their pitches with each other

Steps 11-12: Ongoing Engagement (5 minutes) - WB Pages 17-18

- Quickly review engagement and relationship-building strategies
- Participants check applicable strategies for their situation
- Message: "First contact is just the beginning - consistency builds trust"



Section-by-Section Facilitator's Guide

Action Planning & Commitment (10 minutes) - WB Pages 19-20

- Most important section: Converting insights into actionable next steps
- Have participants complete their 48-hour, 1-week, and 1-month commitments
- Consider: Have each person share ONE commitment aloud (increases accountability)

NEXT STEPS

Page 20 of the workbook provides examples if participants need inspiration!

Your guidance with this workshop will help your team take the steps needed to establish and strengthen partnerships before an outbreak occurs.

Those relationships are the key to our success!

notes:

BUILDING & STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION PARTNERSHIPS

Effective communication is as critical for epidemiologists as accurate case counts.

In this workbook, you will help build your agency's communication infrastructure by focusing on communication partnerships.

Reflect:

What are your biggest communication challenges as an epidemiologist?



WHAT CAN A PARTNER IDENTIFICATION & COMMUNICATION TOOL PROVIDE?

This worksheet helps us:

- 1) Identify key internal and external communication partners/collaborators needed to be effective in surveillance and outbreak investigations specific to your jurisdiction.
- 2) Determine communication levels needed between you and each partner before and during outbreaks to carry out your independent and collaborative roles effectively.
- 3) Assess the actual communication levels you currently have with each identified partner.
- 4) Identify communication strengths and gaps with each partner/collaborator.
- 5) Identify what each key partner/ collaborator wants and needs before an outbreak and during an outbreak in terms of:
 - a) the overall partnership, and
 - b) communications from your agency (information needs, preferred communication methods, and content requirements).

THE WORKSHEET

Step 1: Your LHD's Role in Surveillance & Outbreak Investigations

Reflect on the role your LHD plays/ has played/ will play in surveillance and outbreak investigations, and check all that apply:

- Disease surveillance and monitoring
- Outbreak detection and investigation
- Case interviews and contact tracing
- Environmental health assessments
- Laboratory coordination
- Community notification and education
- Partner agency coordination
- Media communication
- Policy recommendations
- Other:

THE WORKSHEET

Step 2: Select Your Outbreak focus

Choose a type of outbreak for your jurisdiction. This can be the most common outbreak you often experience, an outbreak that you tend to struggle with, or an outbreak you think your LHD is not fully prepared for. Check one below or choose another type:

- Foodborne illness (Salmonella, E. coli, etc.)
- Respiratory illness (flu, COVID-19, etc.)
- Waterborne illness
- Vector-borne disease
- Healthcare-associated infection
- Vaccine-preventable disease
- Other: _____

THE WORKSHEET

Step 3: Identify Key Partners

For your selected outbreak type, identify 3 partners where communication needs to be established or improved and the type of partnership. Partner Types and Examples:

Internal:

- Other departments within your LHD (environmental health, WIC, vital records, administration)
- State health department epidemiologists and program specialists
- Regional health department partners
- LHD leadership and communications staff

External Direct:

- Local hospitals and healthcare systems
- Clinical laboratories
- Emergency management agencies
- Local law enforcement
- School districts and universities
- Other county health departments in your region

External Indirect:

- Local media outlets
- Community-based organizations
- Faith-based organizations
- Business associations and chambers of commerce
- Agricultural extension services
- Veterinarians and animal health officials

THE WORKSHEET

Step 4: Choose a Priority Partner

From the 3 partners you selected on the previous page, above, choose your TOP PRIORITY partner upon which to focus your communication partner exercise:

Priority Partner

Category for Priority Partner

- Other LHD department
- State health department
- Hospital/healthcare system
- Clinical laboratory
- Emergency management
- School system
- Local government
- Media outlet
- Community organization
- Local business/industry
- Other:

THE WORKSHEET

Step 4: Choose a Priority Partner (Continued...)

From the 3 partners you selected on the previous page, above, choose your TOP PRIORITY partner upon which to focus your communication partner exercise:

Communication Types Occurring with This Partner (check all that apply):

- Routine communications
(regular updates, newsletters)

- Important communications
(significant findings, policy changes)

- Urgent communications
(immediate action needed)

- Crisis communications
(emergency response, public safety)

notes:

THE WORKSHEET

Step 5: Level of communication Needed with This Partner

For your priority partner, what level of communication partnership do you NEED with them?



Green: "Good to have as partner" - helpful but not essential



Yellow: "Important partner for mission effectiveness" - significantly improves outcomes



Orange: "Critical for mission success" - major impact on ability to respond



Red: "Cannot function without them" - essential for basic operations

notes:

THE WORKSHEET

Step 6: Current Communication Frequency

How often do you currently communicate with this partner?

- Never - No established communication
- Rarely - Only when absolutely necessary
- Sometimes - Occasional contact, inconsistent
- Regularly - Established pattern of communication

Step 7: Communication Strengths

What currently works well in this relationship?

(Check all that apply and add notes)

- They respond quickly to our requests
- They provide useful information
- They understand our role and constraints
- We have established contact persons
- They're willing to collaborate
- Other strengths:

notes:

THE WORKSHEET

Step 8: Communication Gaps & Improvements Needed

What's missing or could be better? (Check all that apply and add notes)

- Slow or no response to our communications
- Unclear who to contact for different issues
- They don't understand what we do
- Inconsistent information sharing
- No established communication protocols
- Language/jargon barriers
- Other gaps:

notes:

THE WORKSHEET

Step 9: Mutual Value Proposition

What You Need from This Partner

"I want to work with this partner because..."

"The information I most need from this partner is..."

notes:

THE WORKSHEET

Step 9: Mutual Value Proposition (Continued...) What This Partner Needs from You

"This partner would want to work with my agency because..." (Check all that apply)

- Risk reduction for their organization
- Access to our expertise and resources
- Credibility and reputation protection
- Regulatory compliance support
- Community benefit and public safety
- Early warning of health threats
- Professional networking opportunities
- Other:

The information they most need from my agency is...

Mutual Value Proposal:

“Our LHD is preparing for future x outbreaks. We are reaching out to agencies in our community whose services are crucial during an event; to introduce ourselves and talk about how we can support each other’s efforts before/ during/ and after an outbreak. We think our

_____ can serve your agency/ teams/ clients, by supporting your efforts to

_____ and your

_____ would be instrumental in helping us

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Step 10: Introduction & First Contact Strategies

Step 10a: “Warm” Introduction Options

Do you have mutual connections? (Check all that apply)

- State health department contacts
- Professional associations
- Other local health departments
- Community leaders
- Previous colleagues
- None identified yet

Best mutual contact(s):

Step 10b: “Cold” Introduction Research

If no mutual connections, identify best contact method:

- Main organizational phone number
- Website contact form
- LinkedIn professional page
- Email address found through research
- In-person visit to facility

Best contact person/title:

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Step 10: Introduction & First Contact Strategies (Continued...)

Step 10c: Your Elevator Pitch

Draft your 30-second introduction:

Hello, I'm

(your name)

From

(your agency, county, city)

We

(your agency's role in the community)

I

(your role in the agency)

I'm reaching out because

I'd like to

(why you are contacting them - mutual value proposal)

(what you would like - establish contact? collaborate? get something?)

THE WORKSHEET

Step 11: Engagement & Trust Building Strategies

Which strategies will you use? (Check all that apply)

- Share useful information before asking for anything
- Acknowledge their expertise and constraints
- Send quarterly updates or newsletters
- Schedule quarterly coffee meetings (virtual/in-person)
- Invite to annual partner appreciation events
- Update crisis communication contact lists
- Connect them with other relevant partners
- Offer training or educational opportunities
- Other:

notes:

THE WORKSHEET

Step 12: Long-Term Relationship Building

Which strategies will you use? (Check all that apply)

- Document consistent communication schedule
- Set calendar reminders for regular outreach
- Follow through on all commitments made
- Celebrate shared successes publicly
- Include in partner recognition programs
- Seek feedback on our collaboration
- Other:

notes:

What Are Your Next Actionable Steps?

NEXT STEPS

In the Next 48 Hours I Will:

In the Next Week I Will:

In the Next Month I Will:

What Are Your Next Actionable Steps?

NEXT STEPS

Some Ideas!

In the Next 48 Hours I Will:

- Schedule to take one of the trainings on the curated list.
- Continue to gather or share knowledge on partner communications using the VC - Post a question, comment or information on the platform.
- Reach out to at least 1 VC participant to discuss the topic.
- Think about which partner communication elements need to be strengthened or implemented in my jurisdiction.
- Discuss which partner communication elements need to be strengthened or implemented in my jurisdiction with at least one colleague or a mentor.

In the Next Week I Will:

- Discover and Draft an outline of steps that our LHD would need to take to strengthen our partner communications.
- Share key elements of that outline with at least one colleague or a mentor.
- Determine what partners would need to be involved in the steps in my outline.

In the Next Month I Will:

- Determine what resources would be required for my outline.
- Determine which colleagues can work with me to expand on my concept and recruit them.
- Contact one potential partner and establish rapport.