Making Communications Work for You

This document summarizes key strategies discussed during the June 30, 2022, workshop on navigating public health communications infrastructure and capacity challenges. It builds on the workshop content by also providing additional tips and tricks requested by local health department representatives participating in Year 2 of NACCHO’s Rural and Frontier Local Health Department COVID Workforce Capacity Building Project.

A Collection of Strategies, How-To’s, and Plug-and-Play Content—Don’t Start from Scratch, Start Here!

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# Recap of Best Practices: Communicating Impactfully with Your Community

Traditional print and digital communications strategies and practices focus primarily on message content (*what you say*) and channels to distribute messages (*how you say it*). In stressful or novel situations, trust is tested. You may consider going **above and beyond traditional approaches** to make sure your organization’s messages cut through the noise. Taking into account the **relationships you have** with the community members you want to reach, and the **emotional landscape in which they live** can help craft authentic, transparent, and creative messages. To effectively develop and disseminate public health messages that will most resonate with your community, you can consider the following:

* **Situation:** What is going on *right now* in your community where messaging from the health department would be important and impactful?
* **Association:** How do your community members relate to you, your organization, or others they interact with on behalf of your organization?
* **Cultural Framing:** How might different lived experiences shape how your community members receive and respond to your messages?
* **Physical Signals and Emotions:** In situations where physical or emotional cues are visible, what non-verbal communication do you sense among community members, and how might you pivot or re-frame your message accordingly?

The remainder of this section details some public health communications best practices that your organizations can use to attend to the above domains and reach your communities more effectively based on the context in which you work and the community that you serve.

## Strategies for Crafting Your Message

### Making Your Messaging Accessible and Inclusive

Crafting your messaging in a way that will be heard, understood, and accepted by your intended audience is equally as challenging as it is important. One way to promote a positive and effective receipt of your communications is to ensure that they are accessible to and inclusive for the maximum number of people, regardless of educational background, technological literacy or access, native language, etc. Some best practices to develop accessible and inclusive your public health communications include:

#### Logistical Needs

* Use both digital and non-digital communication channels to reach demographics with all ranges of technological literacy
* Develop communications materials in multiple languages to reach non-English speaking community members
* Develop materials at a 3rd grade reading level to cater to all audiences
* Use a tone and demeanor that is acceptable to the community you are trying to reach
* Use “one consistent voice” from all of your communications channels to avoid confusion and conflicting messaging

#### Emotional Safety

* Meet your communities where they are
* Craft messaging that is empowering and promotes choice
* Be transparent with your community about what is known and unknown regarding your communications to foster a relationship of honesty and trust
* Provide staff that speak the first language of the communities you are trying to reach. If you do not have staff to support the language needed, you can slow down your speaking pace and style of speaking and moving to align with the needs of that individual/community
* Adjust your language and approach to accommodate any resistance you receive

### Using the SBAR Approach

There are many frameworks for effective communications. One that can be adapted to relay complex or unwelcome messaging within public health is the SBAR approach. The SBAR approach is an easy-to-remember, concrete mechanism designed to deliver concise and essential information. The SBAR approach is traditionally used to communicate between health care professionals during critical situations, but the approach can be adapted to effectively communicate public health messaging to your communities. The SBAR approach is defined as follows:

* **S**ituation: What is happening now?
* **B**ackground: What has happened in the past that is relevant?
* **A**ssessment: What is the problem / issue in your view?
* **R**ecommendations: What are you asking them to do / what are your recommended actions to address the issue?

The SBAR approach provides a dynamic framework that you can use to convey complex and challenging messages in a clear and concise manner. The SBAR approach can be used to structure your communications regardless of the mechanism or channel you intend to use.

## Strategies for Disseminating Your Message

### Using More than One Mechanism to Share/Reinforce Information

Disseminating communications through a variety of channels will help increase the number of community members your messaging will reach. A wide variety of mechanisms exist to share and reinforce your public health communications, including:

* Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
* Health Department Websites
* Mass texts
* Local news outlets/radio stations
* Direct mailing lists and door hangers
* Call centers/helplines
* Trusted, established, local champions (e.g., primary care physicians, religious leaders, school leaders)
* Partnerships with community organizations (e.g., schools, religious institutions, local pharmacies, advocacy groups, retailers)
* Face-to-face interactions (e.g., distributing flyers, town halls, allowing for Q&A at vaccine and medical care sites)

## Strategies for Getting Feedback from Your Community

### Creating Active Two-Way Communication with the Community

In times of stress when trust is limited, it can be helpful to bring community members together in-person or virtually (depending on comfort and accessibility) to share resources, answer questions, reinforce the messages you’ve shared through other channels, gather feedback, and build relationships. When convening community members, it is helpful to keep in mind the strategies mentioned above for developing accessible messages. These activities may take a higher level of effort to carry out, but they can be impactful for helping community members feel seen and heard. Some examples of Active Two-Way Communication include:

* **Consensus Meetings:** You can use these meetings to support decision-making with your community partners and community members. When planning a consensus meeting, consider selecting a specific topic or set of topics to discuss, identifying a designated moderator to facilitate discussion, and developing protocols for how attendees can contribute to the discussion attendees (e.g., ground rules for discussion, length of comments).You can also communicate next steps for the items discussed at the conclusion of the meeting
* **Town Halls:** You can use these meetings when you want to gather feedback from community partners and community members. When planning a Town Hall consider selecting a specific topic or set of topics to discuss, identifying a designated moderator to facilitate discussion, and developing protocols for managing comments and feedback from meeting attendees (e.g., ground rules for discussion, length of comments).You can also communicate up front to your audience members how you will use their feedback
* **Q&A Sessions:** You can use these meetings to invite a trusted community resource (e.g., a local primary care provider) to answer community questions about sensitive public health topics. When selecting someone to serve as your speaker, consider identifying someone who is well-liked and carries the appropriate authority and gravitas for the topic you are discussing. Similar to Consensus Meetings and Town Halls, you can also consider selecting a specific topic or set of topics to discuss, identifying a designated moderator to facilitate discussion, and developing protocols for managing comments and feedback from meeting attendees (e.g., ground rules for discussion, length of comments)
* **Instagram/Facebook Live:** If you are looking for a Two-Way communications activity that feels less formal, you can consider using your organization’s existing social media accounts to facilitate a live event. On Facebook, you can broadcast from a Desktop or Laptop Computer to your organization’s timeline, a Page you manage, or a Group you manage. You can find step-by-step instructions from Meta for Business here: [Go Live on Desktop or Laptop Computer | Meta Business Help Center (facebook.com)](https://www.facebook.com/business/help/167417030499767?id=1123223941353904). On Instagram, you can invite a guest to your live broadcast and share a replay for those who cannot attend. You can find instructions from Instagram on managing a live broadcast here: [Go Live on Desktop or Laptop Computer | Meta Business Help Center (facebook.com)](https://www.facebook.com/business/help/167417030499767?id=1123223941353904). Additional step-by-step instructions with pictures can be found here: [How to Go Live on Instagram by Yourself or With a Guest (businessinsider.com)](https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-go-live-on-instagram)

## Creating Passive Feedback Loops

In addition to the participatory ways of engaging your community members listed above, you can also consider lower-touch options that you can set up and monitor with minimal effort. This is a more passive way to gather feedback, and it may allow you to reach other members of your community who are not joining your two-way engagement activities. Some examples of passive feedback loops include:

* **Anonymous Pulse Surveys:** You can use brief surveys that take no more than 2-3 minutes to complete to gather feedback on select topics or initiatives. Some examples of free survey platforms you can use include but are not limited to: [SurveyMonkey,](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj-4IyvpqT5AhUyj4QIHbBlCGkQFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.surveymonkey.com%2F&usg=AOvVaw30ECe9ilVVVACdwCs-nI6T) [JotForm](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj-4IyvpqT5AhUyj4QIHbBlCGkQFnoECDcQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jotform.com%2Fsurveys%2F&usg=AOvVaw2xCnuMKuTOxAXatsPimEYe), and [Google Forms](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj-4IyvpqT5AhUyj4QIHbBlCGkQFnoECDsQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Fforms%2Fabout%2F&usg=AOvVaw3YeylwRNEI_R16bck5tVcs)
* **Social Media Polls:** You can create polls on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/help/1927003077398958) or on Instagram [stories](https://www.businessinsider.com/instagram-polls) to briefly capture feedback on a specific item
* **Physical Comment Boxes:** You can install a comment box outside of your Health Department or other community-gathering locations to encourage written feedback
* **Virtual Comment Boxes:** If you prefer a “virtual” comment box to a physical one, you can create a 1-question, open-ended survey for staff to share written feedback online

# Helpful “How-To’s” for Creating Digital Communications

This section provides some helpful how-to resources addressing content areas requested by local health department representatives participating in Year 2 of NACCHO’s Rural and Frontier Local Health Department COVID Workforce Capacity Building Project. The content areas requested include:

* How to create QR codes
* How to set up organizational Social Media accounts
* How to manage comment on Social Media platforms

## Create QR Codes

QR codes are a great way to share URLs in a user friendly and accessible way. All an individual needs to do is scan the QR code with a smartphone camera and they will be taken straight to the intended URL. This is a quick and easy way for your organization to disseminate links to your department website, vaccine appointment sign-ups, reliable information sources about COVID-19, etc. QR codes can be shared virtually as images in an email or on websites, as well as physically printed and posted throughout your community.

The resource link below is the most commonly used free QR code generator on the internet. To create your QR code, simply paste the URL you wish to convert as prompted on the QR code generator website and download the image as instructed.

* <https://www.qr-code-generator.com/guides/how-to-create-a-qr-code/>

## Set Up Organizational Social Media Accounts

In today’s technological climate, social media is one of the most powerful information channels that exists. Social Media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok can help augment your public health messaging to an increasingly diverse audience. Each of these Social Media platforms offer the ability to create an organization/business account. Below are some helpful resources to help your organization set up an account if you do not already have one.

* To create an organizational profile on **Facebook**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/create-organization-profile-facebook-29081.html>
* To create an organizational profile on **Instagram**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://help.instagram.com/502981923235522>
* To create an organizational profile on **Twitter**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Twitter-Account-for-an-Organization>
* To create an organizational profile on **TikTok**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://blog.hootsuite.com/tiktok-for-business/>

## Manage Comments on Social Media Platforms

Commenting is a pervasive part of social media that in the era of COVID-19 sometimes results in the spread of mid/dis-information or threats towards local health department staff. If your organization feels that the ability for anyone to comment on your posts is ultimately unproductive, below are some helpful resources detailing how to limit who can comment on your social media posts.

* To limit who can comment on your **Facebook post**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://www.facebook.com/help/1625371524453896>
* To disable comments on **Facebook Live**, follow the instructions provided at the following source: <https://nerdschalk.com/how-to-turn-off-comments-on-facebook-live/>
* To turn off comments on your **Instagram post**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://help.instagram.com/1766818986917552>
* To hide comments that contain select words and phrases on you **Instagram post**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://help.instagram.com/700284123459336/?helpref=related_articles>
* To hide comments on **Instagram Live**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://www.alphr.com/hide-comments-instagram-live/#:~:text=Once%20you've%20started%20your,Tap%20Turn%20off%20Commenting>
* To turn off replies on your **Twitter post**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://www.techadvisor.com/article/741472/how-to-turn-off-replies-on-twitter.html>
* To limit who can comment on your **TikTok post**, follow the instruction provided at the following resource: <https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/messaging-and-notifications/comments>

# Plug and Play Content

## Disclaimer Language

When posting on social media, it is important to include appropriate disclaimers to clearly communicate expectations and policies with those that engage with your account. Below are some plug-and-play style disclaimer language templates for your LHD to use at your convenience. To use these templates, simply replace your corresponding LHD information when prompted. Additionally, you are free to change the language of the disclaimer to best suit your needs.

### Comment Policy Disclaimer Option 1

Posted comments and images by followers/users do not necessarily represent the views of [your LHD]. External, non-[your LHD] links on this site do not constitute an official endorsement on behalf of [your LHD]. While we encourage folks to share thoughts and opinions on [your LHD] social media pages, we expect that this will be done in a respectful manner. [your LHD] does not agree with or endorse every comment that individuals post on our pages. Our goal is to share ideas and information with as many individuals as possible and our policy is to accept the majority of comments made to our profile.

A comment will be deleted if it contains:

* Hate speech,
* Profanity, obscenity, or vulgarity,
* Nudity in profile pictures or posted images,
* Defamation to a person or people,
* Name-calling and/or personal attacks,
* Comments whose main purpose is to sell a product,
* Comments that infringe on copyrights,
* Spam comments, such as the same comment posted repeatedly on a profile, and
* Other comments that [your LHD] Office of Public Information deems inappropriate

All links posted as comments on [your LHD] posts will be reviewed and may be deleted. Repeated violations of [your LHD] comment policy may cause the author to be blocked from [your LHD] pages.

We understand that social media is a 24/7 medium; however, our moderation capabilities are not. We may not see every inappropriate comment right away, and we are trusting in the maturity of our community to ignore personal attacks and negative speech or respond politely.

### Comment Policy Disclaimer Option 2

By posting any comments, posts, or other material on [your LHD] social media sites, you give [your LHD] the irrevocable right to reproduce, distribute, publish, display, edit, modify, create derivative works from, and otherwise use your submission for any purpose in any form and on any media. You also agree that you will not:

* Post material that infringes on the rights of any third party, including intellectual property, privacy, or publicity rights.
* Post material that is unlawful, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, abusive, slanderous, hateful, or embarrassing to any other person or entity as determined by [your LHD] in its sole discretion.
* Post advertisements or solicitations of business.
* Post chain letters or pyramid schemes.
* Impersonate another person.
* Allow any other person or entity to use your identification for posting or viewing comments.
* Post the same note more than once or "spam."
* Post someone else's health information or any information that would violate patient privacy.
* Post comments related to ongoing or threatened litigations or investigations.

[your LHD] reserves the right (but is not obligated) to do any or all of the following:

* Remove communications that are abusive, illegal, or disruptive, or that otherwise fail to conform with these Terms and Conditions.
* Terminate a user's access to the social media sites upon any breach of these Terms and Conditions.
* Edit or delete any communications posted on the social media sites, regardless of whether such communications violate these standards.

Finally, you agree that you will indemnify [your LHD] against any damages, losses, liabilities, judgments, costs, or expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees and costs) arising out of a claim by a third party relating to any material you have posted.

### Comment Ownership Disclaimer

[your LHD] is dedicated to protecting your health and promoting quality of life through the prevention and control of disease, injury, and disability. For official [your LHD] information, go to [your LHDs website URL].

[your LHD] social media page is provided as a service to social media users for educational use. Posted comments may not originate from [your LHD] and therefore do not necessarily represent the views of [your LHD].

### Social Media Disclaimer Resources

For additional help writing disclaimer language, see the example resources provided below:

* <https://health.utah.gov/social-media-comment-disclaimer>
* <https://www.floridahealth.gov/social-media-disclaimer.html>
* <https://www.tidalhealth.org/about-us/website-social-media-disclaimer>
* <https://cehn.org/website-and-social-media-disclaimer-and-policies/>

## Communications Planning Guidance and Templates

When multiple team members support communications tasks and/or there is turnover among staff, it can be helpful to develop a set of communications planning documents. These documents can help staff coalesce around the direction of communications and detail communications priorities for reference. The remainder of this section includes three templates you can use to document who you are trying to reach, how you will reach them, and how your staff will contribute to these efforts. Depending upon your communications priorities, you may need more than one version of each template (e.g., different communications campaigns, different public health/emergency response efforts).

### Template 1: Engagement Assessment Table

You can use the below table to brainstorm who you are trying to reach and the messages you are trying to convey. You can add or remove rows depending on the number of audiences you want to reach.

Some questions to consider while completing the table include:

* Who is the main audience for your message?
* What are your messaging priorities?
* What level of engagement do you want (e.g., awareness, acceptance, buy-in, champion)?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Audience  Who you want to reach | Decision-Making Role  Their role (if any) in communications process | Messaging Priorities  What you want to convey | Desired Engagement  Level of Buy-In |
| **[Example] Local community-based organizations** | * **[Example]** Provide input as requested on key messages to share with community members | * **[Example]** Reinforce importance of partnerships * **[Example]** Describe services available through the health department | **[Example]** Champion |
| **Text** | * **Text** | * **Text** | **Text** |
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| **Text** | * **Text** | * **Text** | **Text** |
| **Text** | * **Text** | * **Text** | **Text** |

### Template 2: Core Activities Table

You can use the below table to brainstorm the activities, channels, communicators, and communications frequency appropriate for distributing your messages. You can add or remove rows/columns depending on the number of activities and messengers/recipients you want to track.

Some questions to consider while completing the table include:

* What are your communications activities?
* What messages correspond to your communications activities?
* What channels will you use to reach your main audience(s)?
* How frequently will you communicate?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication Activity | Purpose/Key Message | Messengers and Recipients | | | | | | | | | Channel | Frequency |
| **[Example] LHD Reps** | | **[Example] Local Clinicians** | | **[Example] County Residents** | | **Group 4** | | **Group 5** |
| **[Example]**  Community Town Hall | **[Example]** Provide forum for community members to ask clinical providers and health department representatives questions about COVID-19 vaccines | *(Use color or symbols to mark)* | |  | |  | |  | |  | **[Example]** Virtual Meeting | **[Example]** Quarterly |
| **Text** | Text |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | Text | Text |
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| **Text** | Text |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | Text | Text |
|  |  | Legend |  | | Distributor of Message | |  | | Recipient of Message | |  |  |

### Template 3: Communications Roles and Responsibilities Table (RACI)

You can use the below table to document roles and responsibilities related to developing and disseminating your public health communications. The below table is in a RACI format, and you can add or remove rows as needed:

* **Responsible (R):** Responsible for implementing, and/or operating tasks to complete activity
* **Accountable (A):** Oversight and ultimate ownership for the activity being completed
* **Consulted (C):** Opinions sought prior to completing the activity (two-way communications)
* **Informed (I):** Kept up-to-date, notified of progress (one-way communications)

Some questions to consider while completing the table include:

* Who do you need to account for in your roles and responsibilities (e.g., team members, community champions, partners)
* Who supports communications work (e.g., PIO, shared responsibility across team)?
* Who reviews or approves communications work (e.g., PIO, LHD Director)?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Responsible | Accountable | Consulted | Informed |
| **[Example]** Develop drafts and post to Facebook and Twitter | **[Example]** Intern | **[Example]** PIO | **[Example]** LHD Director | **[Example]** Community Partner |
| Text | Text | Text | Text | Text |
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