

FLEXED

Virtual Community (VC)

Webinar 3:

Building & Strengthening

Communication

Partnerships



Workbook

Welcome!

**Thank you for joining us for this
NACCHO FLEXED Webinar on
October 16th, 2025, part of the
NACCHO FLEXED Virtual Community
(VC) Learning Series.**

This workbook contains all the activities and interactive items from the workshop, plus the tools and graphics you need to help facilitate your understanding of the topics covered during our time together.

We encourage you to use this workbook as a tool as you move forward with your mission to strengthen your LHD's partner communications.

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:

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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: _____

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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

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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:

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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:

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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:

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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:

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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:

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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:

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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?)

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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:

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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?



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?



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.