

Communication and Marketing: A Foundational Capability for Local Health Departments

Communication and marketing skills are so fundamental that they need to be present in state and local health departments everywhere for the health system to work anywhere. The ability to communicate clearly, concisely, and persuasively to the public is both a challenge and a fundamental responsibility of health departments. The rise of the internet and social media have allowed health departments to communicate with the public in ways never before imagined. But these technologies have also profoundly altered how people seek and receive information — and raised expectations about government transparency.

To build healthier communities and maintain relevance, health departments must become adept at exchanging relevant information with the public through multiple channels, designing health marketing campaigns, and developing organizational communication and brand strategies. To accomplish this requires staff trained in communication, public relations, and marketing. This document supports the need for public health communicators to be included within the Foundational Capabilities framework.

Media Relations & Public Information

Public health communicators should be trained in media relations and public information, with the ability to:

- Both engage and maintain relationships with local, state, and national media in times of crisis and calm, including the ability to disseminate press releases, implement rapid response strategies, leverage earned media opportunities, conduct press conferences, and use electronic communication tools.

- Gather, synthesize, and translate complex health information and data into clear and culturally appropriate messages that target audiences can access, understand, and act on.
- Build and maintain federal, state, county, and local partner communication networks that can be leveraged as needed to rapidly develop and disseminate consistent, high-priority messages across jurisdictions.
- Conduct real-time (on a 24/7 basis) monitoring of traditional print, broadcast, and electronic media, social networking sites, and other communication channels to ensure rapid response during emerging crises and other public health news events.

Planning

Public health communicators should be trained in communications planning, with the ability to:

- Create and implement a departmental brand strategy and plan that supports the health department's vision, mission, and goals, and communicates the value of the department's practices, products, and services to external and internal audiences in ways that are unique and differentiated from other organizations.
- Create and implement a departmental communication plan that identifies departmental communication goals, objectives, target audiences, core messages, and communication channels and other strategies for delivering messages and information.
- Develop and implement a risk communication strategy, in accordance with Public Health Accreditation Board Standards, to detail the communication and media protocols the health department will follow during a crisis, disaster, outbreak, or other threat.
- Create and implement health marketing plans to inspire environmental, individual behavior, and/or policy change. Successful plans require the ability to conduct formative research to create audience-driven and culturally/linguistically appropriate campaigns and messages.



Communication Channels & Products

Public health communicators should be trained in communications channels and products, with the ability to:

- Build and maintain effective communication channels, including websites, social media platforms, hotlines, newsletters, listservs, and other proprietary department channels, using state-of-the-art communications technology as needed.
- Conceive and produce strategic and compelling written and visual communication products, including press releases, talking points, articles, website and social media content, fact sheets, newsletters, infographics, images, videos, podcasts, presentations, flyers, brochures, and other collateral materials.

Communication Training & Capacity-Building

Public health communicators should be trained in communications capacity building, with the ability to:

- Engage, educate, and cross-train staff to perform key communication functions to improve overall quality of the department's communication activities, such as public speaking, PowerPoint presentations, websites, and social media.
- Recruit, hire, and manage vendors and independent contractors. Activities include, but are not limited to, researching vendors, writing requests for proposals, negotiating contracts, and managing projects.

Evaluation

Public health communicators should be trained in evaluation, with the ability to:

- Use tools including, but not limited to, media tracking, health surveys, and website and social media analytics to evaluate behavior, attitude changes, and overall success of a campaign, product, or message.

Acknowledgments

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT:

<http://naccho.org/communications>