Building Trust in Public Health Communications

Tips for refining your communications process, outreach, and content

A strong foundation of trust enhances our ability to send or receive information. For critical information about public health, building trust with your audiences can strengthen your communications and lead to better health outcomes in your community. Try these tips for refining your process, outreach, and content in a way that builds trust now and into the future.

1 Draft a comprehensive plan.

Begin work on a new resource by mapping out the information you already have. This can include: key messaging, priority audiences, channels for outreach, anticipated complications, and the project budget or timeline. Your draft doesn't have to be perfect, but making a plan can strengthen your approach and identify gaps for support.

TIP: Considering plain language from the start can make your communications more accessible and effective for all audiences.

2 Ask for input.

With a plan in place, call on members of the community to share their insights. Asking for feedback through one-on-one conversations with community leaders, focus groups, or community surveys is a great way to ensure audience perspectives are reflected in your final product.

TIP: By developing culturally driven communications, public health messengers can ensure every member of the community feels represented.

3 Read it back.

Incorporate your new learning into the communications plan and share it with community partners to make sure your approach is tailored and on point. The relationship between feedback and follow-through is critical for building trust long-term and creating an ongoing dialogue with the community.

TIP: Compiling feedback across multiple editors is an art, not a science. If you have conflicting points of view, take time to discuss the best path forward.

4 Check your launch channels.

Once your resource is ready to share, consider your audience's most trusted communications channels. For certain groups it might mean Facebook, for some it might be WhatsApp, and others may prefer a newsletter email. Knowing who you are trying to reach and how they consume information can help ensure your content resonates across the community.

TIP: The right outreach partner can give credibility to your communications and build trust on your behalf, especially in multicultural communities.

5 Improve for next time.

Once your resource is released, track and analyze its engagement and reach in-person, through traditional media, and across digital channels. Welcome additional feedback from end-users and make sure your public feedback channels are accessible and easy to use. Ask your internal team to reflect on the production process and what could be done differently too.

TIP: Beyond feedback on a current resource, consider asking about new resource ideas. Future-focused input will ensure your communications are meeting the needs of your community in real time.

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS COLLABORATIVE

For additional resources and messaging guidance, visit publichealthcollaborative.org.