

COMMUNICATION PLANS AND STRATEGIES

TOPICS

The Power of
Communicating Your
Organization's Mission
and Plans

Overcoming Challenges
to Media Relations

Being Proactive in
Earning the Trust of the
Media

This section outlines the value and characteristics of a communications and public relations plan for your organization. It focuses on developing a set of activities to build positive relationships with diverse public media as a means to advocate for and better accomplish the strategic communication priorities of the health services program or institution.

THE CHALLENGE

The local radio station wants to do a strong series of three programs on the threat, prevention, and treatment of Ebola. You are set up to meet with a small work group of staff and governing body members to guide the work of the reporter. What are the things you should or should not do in order to foster a good relationship with the media?

THE POWER OF COMMUNICATING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S MISSION AND PLANS

No matter how effective and influential your governing body, you cannot achieve your organization's mission without effectively communicating (1) who you are, (2) what you plan to do to improve the health of the populations you exist to serve, and (3) how you plan to strengthen your organization in order to contribute to health gains. Communications matter to your success,

whether it is communicating with internal stakeholders, such as health workers, suppliers and managers, or with external stakeholders, such as clients, beneficiaries, politicians and funders.

Consider these eight components of a good communications plan.

1. **Introduction:** A business plan that summarizes the basics of a health services organization is a great way to help others understand a health services organization like yours. A business plan forms the backbone of your communications plan. It explains the overall goals and strategies, the organization's history and mission statement, and its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Therefore, it is important to take care in creating it and keeping it up to date. There should also be an introduction or executive summary, including a brief situational analysis and explanation of the creation of this plan.
2. **Target audience:** Although you should define your target audience(s) in detail in your business plan, be sure to define it in your communications plan as well. Your audience could differ from or be a smaller portion of your overall target market, so take time to define it carefully.
3. **Goals and objectives:** What is the purpose of this communications plan? What are the expected outcomes? Make sure that they are tied into your organization's overall goals and business plan.
4. **Strategies:** What advantages do you have or want to have in competing for health workers and donor support? What are the organization's priorities? For example, are you looking to increase the utilization for maternal health care? Consider expressing the goals and objectives in a more tangible form. Make sure that your strategies, goals, and objectives are all SMART: Specific, Measurable, Applicable, Realistic, and Time bound. The goals should not be unattainably high but challenging and exciting, though somewhat difficult.
5. **Tactics:** How will you increase service utilization or donor funding support? This is also a place where you can create a measurable goal. How high would you like your performance measures to rise? What are the tools you plan to use to increase them? Be specific and make sure that your tactics all make sense to use. Be realistic about the types of communications—for example, radio—that are not likely to increase the use of services among your beneficiaries.
6. **Implementation:** When will you implement your tactics? Create a timeline that shows who is responsible for what. This will help to keep everyone aligned. It can also help you to create a better budget by showing where time is needed and where it is spent.
7. **Monitoring and evaluation:** How will you measure success? Create benchmarks and use them to assess whether a tactic was successful or not, and use that information in future planning. Be sure to evaluate the plan when it comes to an end, so that you can learn from unsuccessful tactics.

8. **Budget:** This is most important if your communications plan was created by an outside party, but it can also be applicable if you are presenting the plan to your governing body to be included in your health services organization's budget. Use the above information to support your presentation to a board or executive team. There should be no items here that were not covered in the above sections.

What are the benefits to your governing body of having a structured communications plan for your health services organization? Most organizations would see these five benefits.

1. **Save time:** The members and management related to the governing body are more likely to use their time and reputations most effectively; there is less wasted effort and money, with a greater impact on the attitudes of your key stakeholders.
2. **Mobilize funds:** Money needed to implement the plan can more readily be mobilized in advance before it is needed.
3. **Engage stakeholders:** Developing the plan with staff and community leaders will help generate not only better strategies of who to communicate with, what to communicate to the target audiences, and how best to deliver the messages, but it will also help build and nurture positive relationships with these stakeholders.
4. **Alert the media:** The process of developing your plan can be used to alert the media that your organization is becoming more organized and that you value the media's role as your partner to improve the health and well-being of your area's high-risk and vulnerable populations.
5. **Improve impact:** A formal plan of action is likely to help you achieve at least 20% to 30% greater results by following a disciplined roadmap that defines who you need to influence, the messages to need to deliver, and the channel, mechanism, and style with which you must deliver each message to connect with the target audience.

Mass media is a major set of means through which your organization can communicate with these audiences.

Why should governing bodies care about the media? The short answer is the media can help you build political support, attract staff, help your beneficiaries use your services better to impact their health, and mobilize needed resources for your organization's success and vitality.

Some people—elected leaders, professional athletes, actors, rock stars—need public relations to handle the daily crush of media requests. But any health services organization, however big or small, can use the same tools to get out its message.

For examples of media relations toolkits that can be adapted to your setting, you can make use of resources such as those shown in Box 24.1.

BOX 24.1 Media relations toolkits

For a comprehensive set of ideas from North America, see Steven R. Van Hook, “Public Relations Toolkit: How to PR” (Santa Barbara, CA: Worldwide Media Relations, 2014). Available at: <http://www.aboutpublicrelations.net/toolkit.htm>

For resources in Africa, see Sunday Odedele, “PR for Africa” (Lagos, NG: PRfA, 2012). Available at: <http://prforafrica.org/download.html>

For how a hospital connects to its community, see American Hospital Association, “Engaging Communities in the Redefinition of the H: Tools and Resources” (Chicago, IL: American Hospital Association, 2015). Available at: <http://www.aha.org/research/cor/redefiningH/index.shtml>

For tools for county public health departments, explore these resources from the US; see NACCHO, “Toolbox” (Washington, DC: National Association of County and City Health Officials, 2015). Available at: <http://naccho.org/toolbox/>

Campaigns can also be targeted at particular audiences and vulnerable populations. For communicating with injecting drug users, consider Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *The One & Only Campaign* (Atlanta, GA: CDC, 2014). Available at: http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/campaign_resources

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO MEDIA RELATIONS

There’s a lot of truth to the old joke that public relations is “the care and feeding of reporters.” That’s the essence of public relations: informing and persuading the public, not one person at a time, but by the thousands or millions through newspapers, radio, television, and the internet. But some of these reports express a poor opinion of health services providers and health workers. They may be skeptical and suspicious about your capabilities and motivations. Make sure your intentions are sincerely focused on strengthening your service delivery in ways that yield better health outcomes for real people in your area.

Health sector leaders in low- and middle-income countries can use carefully-crafted communication strategies to increase the influence and vitality of their health programming, to expand both the use of services and the resources to attract health workers, secure essential medicines, and strengthen the organization’s overall viability.

Directors of communications can consider these actions to leverage new relationships with local media decision-makers:

- Develop and maintain a “media directory” of all of the officers, leaders, and reporters in the public media resources in your area, including mass media outlets for TV, radio, newspapers, billboards, and social media on the internet.
- Meet with the leaders of each form of media and document their top priority editorial criteria for news and communication stories. Then map their interests back to the health priorities of your organization. Develop an

annual plan of interactions and story development that is in sync with their editorial calendar and themes of interest. Your messaging and proposed collaboration should emphasize where your interests intersect. For example, radio may be looking for a story on birth experiences, and the newspaper may want to draw attention to new staffing plans for community health workers, or feature a profile of a new surgeon who will be covering the local health centers twice per month.

- Arrange for periodic meetings with each of the media outlets to keep them informed about your plans and progress, and to clarify issues that may arise about errors or weaknesses in your performance. Your credibility will be enhanced if you meet with them to educate them before you need them. Transparency and prompt interaction to resolve rather than avoid negative publicity will serve you well. Covering up problems rarely works, and it can damage the longer-term relationships you need to impact politicians and donors.
- Invite reporters to conduct media relationship training for board members, senior managers, and health workers regarding the value of transparency and earned trust; the need for honesty even when errors are made; the power of clear and short statements of facts; and how best to manage hostile inquiries, errors in reporters' analyses, and general complaints.
- Develop and follow a written media relations protocol so that only two people, the CEO and the governing body chairperson, are authorized to talk with the media at difficult times. Having multiple spokespersons will create confusion and undermine your credibility and control of your communication. For a sample media relations plan, see [Appendix 24.1](#).

BEING PROACTIVE IN EARNING THE TRUST OF THE MEDIA

Governing bodies should understand that the main goal of a communications or public relations strategy is to enhance their health program or organization's reputation. Staff who work in public relations are able to present an organization or individual to the world in the best light. The role of the plan's strategy then can be seen as a reputation protector as well as reputation enhancer.

Public relations outlets provide a service for your organization by helping to give the public and the media a better understanding of how the organization works. Within a health program or health system, public relations can also come under the title of public information or beneficiary (or patient, client, or customer) relations. These staff assist people if they have any problems with the organization.

See Box 24.2 for important information about the difference between earned media and paid media.

BOX 24.2 Earned media versus paid media

Public relations is different from marketing, which is about getting people to buy something, typically with advertising campaigns, which cost money. You can—and often should—generate public relations without spending money for advertising.

That’s why public relations people often talk about “earned media.” You don’t take out ads in the newspaper, on the radio, or on television. Instead, you earn stories and coverage.

But earned media cuts both ways. Just as you can earn press coverage for good things, you earn it for bad events, too, and you have to manage bad news through crisis communications.

Here are some of the tools in your communications and public relations toolbox.

- **To inform:** fact sheets, press releases, press conferences, or town hall meetings
- **To persuade and inspire:** speeches, letters to the editor, guest columns, radio talk show appearances, newspaper editorial board meetings
- **Multimedia:** photos, charts, websites, blogs, film clips, radio public service announcements and social media such as Facebook or Twitter

When your goal is to inform people about an issue or event, public relations has a lot in common with journalism. When you’re trying to persuade, public relations leans on the ancient art of rhetoric and the modern science of persuasion.

What are you already doing to link with and influence the media? How effective are your current communication strategies for your clinic, health advocacy agency, supply distribution system, or program, department, council, or hospital?

Build formal plans and investments from a candid assessment of your reputation and communication activities, and a plan of action you develop in partnership with beneficiaries, suppliers, and funders.

APPENDIX 24.1

Sample Media Plan

Good governing bodies think and act strategically about how they communicate with and engage the public and the media in their decision-making work. Explore how these samples can shape your development of sensible public relations and media relations plans. The board should coordinate all communications with the CEO as s/he are most likely to understand the many aspects and complexities of your strategic messaging and communication s with multiple stakeholders.

Ways for the public to engage and communicate with a health provider in England:
<http://www.westlancashireccg.nhs.uk/have-your-say/>

For a US Children's Hospital, their website indicates this policy:
<http://www.phoenixchildrens.org/newsroom/media-relations-policy>

You can adapt this example below from the National Associations of Community Health Centers in 7501 Wisconsin Ave, Suite 1100W, Bethesda, MD USA 20814:
<https://www.nachc.com/toolkit-online.cfm>

Goal: To create an awareness among the public and policy makers of

- what CHCs are and what they do
- who CHCs serve
- the value of CHCs to the community
- the cost effectiveness of CHCs

Media Options:

- TV stations: news, talk shows
- news radio: news, talk shows
- daily and weekly newspapers: news stories, feature stories, op-eds, editorials, letters to the editor
- public service announcements

Phase I: Planning and Preparation

1. **Develop Your Message.**
 - a. Have a local and/or human interest hook about the CHCs that is an important story (i.e. give them something they can “sell” to their readers).
 - b. Select and train your spokespeople.
 - c. Prepare a basic “stump” speech/op-ed that delivers your message.
2. **Designate a media coordinator** and identify one or two key media spokespeople.
3. **Prepare a Media Briefing Book.**
 - a. background narrative
 - b. fact sheets and side-by-sides
 - c. copies of newsletters
 - d. human interest stories
 - e. press clippings
 - f. key issues summaries (policy papers)
4. **Compile a media contact list.**
 - a. print: key reporters, editors, feature writers
 - b. TV: reporters, assignment editors, talk show producers
 - c. radio: news editors, talk show producers
5. **Compile a list of community organizations** that receive frequent/positive media coverage for potential speaking engagements.
 - a. program chairs
 - b. lead time needed for scheduling events
6. **Develop a media event calendar.** Try to identify or plan at least one good press opportunity a month. Identify annual events or activities that should be media events. For example:
 - a. annual open house
 - b. Child Health Month
 - c. Women’s Health Month
 - d. legislative reception
 - e. awards dinner near Christmas (this is a slow news time and a good time for features)

Phase 2: Implementing the Plan

1. Contact key reporters, editors, and producers by phone to introduce yourself and your health center or association. If possible, set up a brief personal meeting. Establish your credibility by initiating regular contact so a reporter gets to know who you are.
2. Follow up by sending or hand delivering a copy of your Briefing Book.
3. Learn individual reporters' story interests (especially producers) and call them when a an idea for a good story surfaces.
4. Schedule speaking engagements at one or two of the well-covered community organizations and arrange coverage.
5. Develop an identifiable organizational template or format to use when sending press releases and other notices to the media.
6. Arrange opportunities to call a press conference, send a press release, schedule an editorial board meeting, write an opinion editorial, or send a letter to the editor.