GILEAD

05 Module

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION PLANS

About This Module

Sharing the findings of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a fundamental part of conducting research. Engaging community partners in the communication process ensures that the research outcomes reach those who stand to benefit the most and allows for a more nuanced understanding of the implications of the findings. In this module, we'll delve into the essential elements of a communication and dissemination plan, from setting clear objectives and identifying key audiences to crafting tailored messages and selecting appropriate communication channels. The phases outlined—from planning and product development to interactive presentations and evaluation— underscore the dynamic and collaborative nature of effective communication strategies in CBPR.

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What Is A Dissemination Plan?

A dissemination plan is a structured process of sharing research findings with professional audiences to increase their impact and potential for use in other settings. Technical language is used, and the findings are typically shared through peer-reviewed journals and conference presentations. While these activities may be part of disseminating findings from a CBPR project, sharing results with the community in a way that is easily accessible and understood is essential for the use of research findings in a community context and is crucial for the implementation and sustainability of CBPR projects.

What Is A Communication Plan?

Communication plans target a wide array of audiences, including the media, community members and the public. They encompass details about the research project, insights gained and broader implications that extend beyond the replication of results. These plans may use various channels such as newsletters, press releases, project fact sheets, brochures and social media platforms. These plans may also identify peer-reviewed journals, academic or practitioner conferences, and other scientific or professional venues for sharing results. The language used is intentionally straightforward to ensure accessibility for non-experts and promote utilization by the community.

Most Request for Proposals (RFPs) will require that a dissemination plan or communication plan is included in the proposal. For the purposes of this module, we will use the broader term "communication plan" to include the wide range of audiences and objectives included in the CBPR process.

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Developing A Communication Plan

A communication plan is a structure for sharing the outcomes, lessons learned and other important information about your project with others. Broadly speaking, the communication plan addresses the following:

- What do you hope to achieve by sharing your findings?

- Who is the audience you are trying to reach? How will you tailor the information you share for that audience?

- What do you want your audience or audiences to do with the information? Is there a call to action?

- How will you know if you have achieved the goals of your communication plan?

In outlining the communication plan in your proposal, include your plans to develop materials and share findings. These steps, described in detail below, can be tailored to fit your project.

COMMUNICATION PLAN - OUTLINE

Phase 1: Planning

01.   Establish communication partners.

02.   Define communication objectives.

03.   Identify audiences.

04.   Develop communication messages.

05.   Select communication channels and products to be developed.

06.   Create a timeline and an action plan.

Phase 2: Product Development

01.   Develop communication materials.

02.   Write reports for the funding organization as required.

03.   Develop manuscripts for publication.

Phase 3: Presentation And Follow-Up

01.   Hold interactive community presentations.

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PHASE ONE

Phase 1: Communication Planning

01 **Establish communication process.**

The first step is to assemble community partners who will actively participate as co-creators in developing the communication plan. Established community partners and existing community advisory boards are potential sources of partners and can assist in identifying other stakeholders interested in contributing to this process. It is advisable to involve at least one strong community partner and ideally members of the community. Their insights are invaluable for shaping messages, selecting effective communication channels and placing findings in the appropriate context. If English is not your first language, and you would benefit from partners who can help with effective communication, they can be added to your team as well. Academic partners can play a crucial role in developing manuscripts, preparing abstracts for conferences and crafting communication strategies. Refer to plainlanguage.gov for a refresher and to answer questions as you write.

Once you determine who your dissemination partners are, begin by convening meetings to develop an inclusive process for developing the plan and timeline, allowing all stakeholders to contribute their perspectives and insights. During these meetings, determine the following:

- What are your shared missions or goals?

- How will you ensure that the plan reflects the diverse needs and interests of the community?

- What are potential barriers to dissemination and utilization of your research and how will you address them?

- Who will be responsible for each step in your plan? Will community partners be co-authors and co-presenters if interested?

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02 Define communication objectives.

The communication plan should describe what you and your community partners want to achieve by sharing the information learned from the project. Set clear, measurable objectives. The purpose may be to benefit the community, the scientific field or to inform your future work. There may be multiple goals for sharing research findings, such as to:

- Raise awareness about the research among a community, professionals or the public

- Educate community members about the public health problem and the research findings

- Get feedback from the community

- Promote change in systems or organizations

- Advocate for and support community action

- Influence local, state or national policy

03 Identify audiences.

The next step is to identify the various individuals, groups and organizations interested in your project and its outcomes. Each audience has distinct information needs and preferences, which will influence your choice of communication channels and message development. For instance, you may create materials tailored for patients to be distributed in clinics, alongside specific messages for healthcare providers at those facilities. The style and content of these materials will vary accordingly.

Potential audiences may include community groups, policymakers, healthcare professionals, funding agencies, donors, advocacy groups and government entities. Additionally, consider internal stakeholders such as partners and colleagues within your organization. It's also essential to include the funding organization among the key audiences in your communication strategy.

In generating a list of the audience for your communication activities, discuss with your community partners:

- Who will benefit from this project and the research findings? How can you involve them in the communication planning process?

- What potential difficulties are there in communicating with your audiences? For example, do they see you as a trusted source of information?

- Are there barriers to their receiving or finding your research or to their abilities to use it?

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04 Develop communication messages.

A communication plan requires clear, concise messages that succinctly outline your research findings. Tailor these messages to resonate with your target audience and highlight the significance of your findings. Ensure your communication includes a clear call to action wherever feasible. Implement the Bottom-Line Up Front (BLUF) method by crafting a one- to two-sentence summary that encapsulates the core message of your communication materials.

Use plain language to summarize key points clearly. Distill the main findings or concepts into concise messages using simple language. Focus on the most critical information that your audience needs to understand.

Include a call to action. Even short social media posts should include a call to action. What do you want the audience to do with the information in the message? It may encourage them to take specific actions based on the research findings, advocate for change or be aware of a particular issue. A call to action can foster a sense of ownership and commitment to the research outcomes and their broader implications for the community and the scientific field.

Tailor messages specifically for each audience based on their priorities and concerns. Focus on highlighting research findings that directly relate to what matters most to each audience. Since research projects often yield multiple findings, create different messages to present those findings that are most relevant to each specific audience. Messages aimed at other researchers should address whether the findings are applicable across different geographical contexts or populations and identify limitations to their generalizability. Highlight novel findings and discuss potential for replicating the findings on a larger scale.

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05 Select communication channels and products.

Work with your community partners to identify the most effective communication channels to reach your target audience or audiences. How does each audience typically access news and health-related information? The delivery methods you select to disseminate your messages may include local media channels, community gatherings, social media platforms and grassroots organizations. Consider joining an existing community group or town hall meetings or host informational sessions to share your findings. Ask community partners to share your messages on socials channels. Health or biotech-related events in the area where the work was done may also provide opportunities to present results. Use the table in Appendix 5-1 to develop a plan to assess the preferences of each of the audiences you have identified.

Choosing the appropriate communication products is crucial for effectively sharing your messages with different audiences. Select formats that best resonate with your target audience's preferences for receiving information. Develop visually appealing and easily understandable materials such as brochures, posters and infographics. Consider utilizing multiple platforms including paid and organic social media, websites, blogs, radio announcements, fact sheets, policy papers, academic journal articles and white papers. Reports can be modified into a video format to share in different communication channels. Additionally, plan to translate materials into multiple languages when needed.

Your proposal should include the number of events and products you have planned and any other elements that have time and budget implications. However, it is important to create a flexible plan that can be tailored to each community group and evolve through continued dialogue with the community.

Tips For Working With The Media

- Develop relationships with those who are interested in your health topics and services.

- Be responsive when they reach out to you for information.

- Prepare talking points in advance and stay on message.

- Be open about what you don't know or what is uncertain in your field.

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06 **Create a timeline and an action plan.**

Next, establish a timeline for your communication plan. Sharing findings in a timely manner with the right audiences enhances their potential to drive meaningful change. Decide on the schedule and frequency for disseminating your data, findings (including preliminary ones), research process, methodology and lessons learned. Determine when you will post messages on social media, when presentations will be held, when fact sheets and other materials will be finalized and distributed, when they will be evaluated, etc. Use the Timeline Worksheet in Appendix 5-2 to plan your activities and ensure that they stay on track.

After completing these steps, develop an action plan tailored to each audience using the table provided in Appendix 5-3.

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PHASE TWO

Phase 2: Product Development

01 **Develop communication materials.**

As you develop the materials that were outlined in the planning phase, you can use the following guidelines:

Lead with the "BLUF" (Bottom Line Up Front): Ensure materials start with the most crucial message for that audience. Given that most people only read the first few lines, particularly online, beginning with the key message maximizes communication effectiveness.

Use plain language: Avoid jargon and unnecessarily complex language. Even academic audiences appreciate clear, easy-to-read materials. Replace complex terms with simpler alternatives whenever possible. For example, instead of "utilize," use "use;" instead of "facilitate," use "help." If technical terms are unavoidable, provide definitions in plain language either within the text or in a glossary. Provide links or references to more technical scientific materials for readers who want more information.

Consider your audience's literacy level: Assess the literacy level of your audience and ensure readability by having someone from your target audience or a community partner review your content. This feedback can highlight areas where the language might be unclear or where adjustments are needed to improve comprehension.

Consider cultural context: Cultural context should always be considered in the presentation of research findings. Collaborate with community partners to ensure the content aligns with cultural norms and values, using imagery, colors, symbols, graphics or pictures that resonate effectively with the audience.

Create plain language summaries of scientific materials: Develop versions of research materials with detailed scientific information that use plain language and present complex concepts in an accessible format. Incorporate visual aids such as charts, graphs or infographics to enhance comprehension. Use formatting techniques like bullet points and headings to organize information logically. Include white space in the materials so that they are not text-heavy and are more appealing to read.

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02 Write reports for the funding organization as required.

The communication plan should include preparing and submitting reports to the funding organization as specified in the RFP. These reports should provide a comprehensive overview of the research project and its outcomes, including all of the information specified in the funding announcement. Emphasize the impact of these efforts in advancing knowledge and fostering positive community change.

03 Develop communication materials.

Prepare manuscripts for publication in peer-reviewed journals, adhering to the specific guidelines and standards of each publication. Collaborate closely with community partners and stakeholders to ensure accurate representation and interpretation of research findings. Acknowledge the contributions of community members throughout the publication process, acknowledging their valuable insights and support. For additional recommendations about preparing and submitting journal articles visit:
https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/

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Phase 3: Presentation Phase

01 **Hold interactive community presentations.**

Conduct interactive community presentations that facilitate meaningful discussions and generate input from those directly affected by the findings or the health issue. These meetings offer an opportunity for community members to offer insights into how the findings resonate with their experiences, potentially enhancing their relevance in both community and professional settings. Consider having a community partner co-lead or facilitate the meeting to enhance trust and encourage participation in discussions.

Allocate sufficient time for questions, comments and open discussions to create a collaborative environment where community members feel acknowledged and valued. Use storytelling and real-life examples to make the information relevant and engaging. Encourage researchers and community members to share personal anecdotes related to the findings or the research process.

During these gatherings, attendees may suggest customizing the messaging or recommend additional groups for presentations. Refine the dissemination process based on participant feedback. Consider scheduling additional meetings to gather ideas that can inform future research directions.

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Summary

Developing a comprehensive communication plan is essential for ensuring that research findings are effectively communicated and used by diverse audiences. Engaging community partners at every step is paramount, as their insights not only enhance the relevance and cultural sensitivity of communication materials but also foster trust and participation among stakeholders. Incorporating calls to action and emphasizing inclusivity can inspire meaningful community engagement and promote tangible outcomes that address local needs and advance scientific understanding.

Reminders For Writing The Communication And Dissemination Plans Section:

01. Use your proposal outline and writing template (Module 3).

02. Keep an eye on the proposal writing calendar you developed (Module 3) and adjust as needed.

03. Use the specific language in the RFP you are responding to.

04. Reinforce your proposal themes where appropriate. For example, can you highlight a community partnership that will increase the reach and impact of your findings in the community? Do you have strong media partners or experience with creative communications materials?

05. Put a check mark on the "Proposal Requirement Checklist" (Module 1) when you have developed each requested element in this section.

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Appendix 5-1: Audience Assessment

Audience	Demographics	Priorities/Values	Preferred Channels	Relevant Project Data To Share	Project Involvement

Appendix 5-2: Timeline Worksheet

Task	Person Responsible	Due Date
Ex: Develop fact sheets.		
Ex: Distribute fact sheets to clinics.		

Appendix 5-3: Communication Action Plan

Audience	Communication Objective	Message/Call to Action	Product	Channel/Dissemination Method	Timeline	Evaluation Measures