

Guide to Developing a Communications Plan

What is a Communications Plan?

A communications plan is a written document that acts as a roadmap for successfully communicating important messages to your key audiences. It describes what you want to accomplish and the best ways to achieve those goals and objectives. In developing a communications plan, you will identify target audiences, key messages, and appropriate ways of getting the message out; set timelines; and outline key measurements of success.

Why Do We Need a Communications Plan?

A communications plan will help focus your outreach, so that when you engage with key audiences—such as elected officials, community leaders and the public—your efforts will be successful. Developing a communications plan with goals and tactics customized to your needs can also help you utilize your resources more efficiently and effectively.

A communications plan related to your CPPW grant will help your organization will help you meet your communications goals while also strategically advancing CPPW's policy priorities, which aim to increase public access to healthy choices and environments.

What Should We Include in a Communications Plan?

Because the best communications plans are tailored to support specific goals, components can vary widely. To help you in your planning processes, highlighted below are the most common and important steps to take in building an effective communications plan.

I. **Situation Analysis / SWOT**

Before you begin, take some time for a self-audit using the SWOT approach, assessing your organization's **s**trengths and **w**eaknesses (internal factors), **o**pportunities and **t**hreats (external factors). In assessing your internal strengths and weaknesses, record successful communications efforts, areas where communication has been ineffective, and communication assets and deficits. As you think about opportunities and threats, consider how the current political, social and/or economic landscape (both locally and nationally) can impact your communications work.

II. **Goal**

Once you have assessed your situation, think about your overarching communications goal. Communications campaigns, broadly speaking, raise awareness about a particular issue, increase knowledge or provide a call to action. For CPPW, include desired policy, system and environmental changes.

III. **Objectives**

Consider measurable objectives that support your overarching goal.

IV. **Target Audiences**

Select the group or groups of people who are most important for you to engage with and whose buy-in is necessary to achieve the overarching goal (primary audience). Consider also broader audiences and stakeholders who can help you reach your primary audience (secondary audience).

V. Key Messages

Develop key messages—concise and consistent statements that clearly communicate the overarching goal, fit within the objectives, and speak to target audiences. Three to five key messages are sufficient.

Your organization’s messages should incorporate and complement the overall CPPW, HEAL and Tobacco messaging. Please contact your communications TA provider (Nicole Sadow-Hasenberg or Alanna Beebe) for more information.

VI. Spokespeople and Partners

Identify spokespeople and partners that can help share your message with your target audiences.

VII. Tactics

Specify tactics (including individual projects, programs, and earned and paid media efforts) that when implemented will create a cohesive communications strategy in support of your objectives and goal.

VIII. Timeline

Establish a timeline for your plan—including when you will implement and complete each tactic—to stay focused on communications goals and to make the most efficient use of your time. Timelines can be formatted in a variety of ways. You can create simple but effective timelines using Microsoft Word or Excel.

IX. Measurements

Develop concrete ways to track the progress of your communications efforts. Doing so will help you identify tactics that are working well and give you the information you need to make adjustments.

CPPW communications and evaluation teams are developing some standard measures to help you think about how to measure your efforts.