Ask the Expert Session 4: Summary Discussion Notes
Communication and Media Planning for Comprehensive Cancer Control:
CDC Requirements and Expectations
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Experts

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Questions, Answers, and Ideas

What does the communication or media plan need to contain?

- CDC: Communication or media plans should specify target audiences for interventions/strategies, media channels, task lists, timelines, allocated budget and a method to assess and evaluate. Communication plan should include a media plan component.
- CDC: Objectives in the communication or media plan should draw from and have good alignment with objectives from the Program’s Comprehensive Cancer Control (CCC) action plan and state cancer plan. The communication or media plan should support and increase awareness of CCC activities.
- CDC: Take into account what is available through earned and owned media.

Should a communication or media plan span 1 year or more than 1 year?

- CDC: Plans most typically focus on current program year; however some states submit plans that cover multiple years. Either is acceptable.

What is the timeline for updating communication or media plans submitted to CDC?

- CDC: Consult with your program’s CDC project officer for the most up to date media plan submission timeline guidance. Program Year 3 Communication/Media plan submission deadline was on September 1, 2014; it is suggested to consider this timeline until additional notification is given. Again, please consult with your program’s CDC project officer. Communication and media plans should be upload in CDMIS and a courtesy copy forward to your program’s CDC project officer via email.

Should CCC programs budget for media activities using allocated CCC funding, or should funds come from coalition/consortium funds?

- CDC: Either source of funding is permissible and available as an option.
How should communication or media plan priorities be determined?

- CDC: Priorities in the communication or media plan should be well-aligned with priorities in the action plan and/or state cancer plan. Identify key areas where a media strategy would complement action plan priorities and help direct focus by defining target audiences.

How can CCC programs do communication work in environments where state administrations are reluctant to approve media campaigns and small media?

- Leverage partnerships with the CCC coalitions, which do not have the communication restrictions that some state agencies may have.
  - Example: Indiana’s CCC program collaborates closely with Indiana Cancer Consortium to align work plans and public communication efforts to ensure consistent messaging and approaches. Through this joint effort, they are able to disseminate key messages and increase awareness of CCC agenda.

What are some ideas for communication activities that are not too expensive or time-consuming, beyond just e-newsletters and social media?

- Seek partnerships with groups interested in communicating key messages well-aligned with CCC goals. Some may already have communication activities underway, presenting the opportunity to pool resources and streamline efforts. Partnerships increase your number of available media channels and reach. Stay alert for opportunities to highlight the cancer angle in other ongoing health initiatives and include chronic disease programs.
  - Example: A state’s chronic disease staff created an integrated chronic disease media plan and is coordinating efforts to develop an obesity public service announcement.
  - Example: Utah’s CCC program works with other CDC-funded programs, other state agencies (e.g., environmental health), and local health departments. They are able to share time and money and coordinate joint messaging for more effective communication.
  - Example: Indiana’s CCC program supports state and local Complete Streets partner communication efforts by offering to write letters to the editor on the initiative’s benefits to cancer prevention, which also raises cancer awareness at little cost.

- Owned media: host a website or maintain a blog. To increase your website’s reach, make it easy to find by optimizing it for search engine use.

- Earned media: encourage CCC staff, coalition members and partners to cultivate good relationships with local media outlets. When opportunities arise, write letters to the editor or invite local media partners to cover events or conduct interviews.

How should CCC programs and coalitions go about defining audiences?

- CDC: Consider your data when deciding which populations to target. You may define your target audience according to which demographics experience highest incidence or mortality. Geographic information systems and spatial analysis can be used to determine geographic clusters and identify specific counties, regions or census blocks and communities.
  - Example: Indiana Cancer Consortium leverages its regional coalition structure to geographically tailor and disseminate key messages. They find regional data on each health district’s specific pattern of cancer burden through the cancer registry or BRFSS coordinator. A generic “Swiss cheese” press release is rewritten for each regional area for maximum relevance to each area’s particular issues. These messages are promoted through each region’s local relationships with media partners.

- Indiana’s CCC program decides on universally consistent key messages that get “tweaked” to make them appropriate for specific audiences and channels. In crafting messages, they think about: “Who needs what information to take which actions?”
  - Example: Messages in Indiana’s HPV vaccination toolkit are subtly adjusted by whether they are targeted towards parents, patients, or providers.
  - Example: Indiana’s messages for websites and social media have a very general tone and are simple enough for anyone to understand because anyone in the public might come across it.
  - Example: Indiana Cancer Facts and Figures report contains more detailed data for dissemination to members of Indiana Cancer Consortium and partner organizations for the purpose of strategic planning and funding opportunity announcements. This data is simplified into a more digestible form.
format and appropriate literacy level for public dissemination (e.g. infographs). Often, CCC members and partners are the program or coalition’s target audience. CCC programs or coalitions share messages from the CDC or campaigns such as 80 by 2018 with CCC members and partners, who in turn communicate with their local communities.

What are some best practices for managing the CCC program or coalition’s social media accounts and interactions with the public?

- Select a dedicated coalition organization member to manage the account(s). The state health department may not have the flexibility and may need additional clearance.
- Make yourself available and be responsive.
- Be transparent about protocols for interaction, such as a public disclaimer on which posts from the public will be kept, deleted, or responded to. Formal guidelines can proactively address concerns such as incorrect or inflammatory content on CCC social media outlets, and allow staff to point to specific rationales for their actions.
  - Example: Tobacco Free Indiana and Hoosiers for a Healthier Indiana had to manage conversations about smoke free air and tobacco tax policies. Postings were deleted if they did not add to the conversation, were hateful, or not genuine questions.

How can objectives in media plans address the CDC priority of policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change?

- To achieve PSE change, CCC programs and coalitions must identify stakeholders who have an interest in the issue or are in a position to create the desired change. These stakeholders are the target audiences for the CCC program/coalition’s communication and media strategies. Communication and media planning can help with systematically understanding each group of stakeholders’ core values and worldview, which will guide the CCC program/coalition’s choice of appeals and targeted messaging.
  - Example: Utah’s CCC program developed a media plan detailing a three-tiered strategy to address radon exposure. They implemented a social media campaign on Facebook and Youtube targeting homeowners in a specific geographic region to raise awareness and encourage radon testing and mitigation. They wrote a white paper covering disease burden that targeted policymakers. They also worked with local health departments to develop communication/media plans for local county or city-level stakeholders and policymakers around radon.

Expert and participant-recommended resources:

- Planning Guidance
  - CDC Comprehensive Cancer Control Branch’s Media Plan Guidance: How to create and implement and effective media plan
- Communication Guidance
  - CDC Clear Communication Index: A Tool for Developing and Assessing CDC Public Communication Products
  - CDC’s Guide to Writing for Social Media
  - CDC’s Facebook Guidelines and Best Practices
  - CDC’s Twitter Guidelines and Best Practices
- Tools from GW Cancer Institute
  - Communication Training for Comprehensive Cancer Control (CCC) Professionals 101: Media Planning and Media Relations: This free online training walks participants through the process of media planning, creating media-friendly materials and building relationships with journalists. It includes background information, resources and customizable templates, so after completing the training, you will have a tailored media plan and media-ready materials for your cancer control program to use
  - Media Planning and Media Relations Guide
  - Media/Communication Plan Template
  - Social Media Toolkits contain a summary of social media analytics and metrics
  - Forthcoming: Online training and guide on planning, implementing and evaluating an evidence-based communication campaign for cancer control (Winter 2015-16)