Communication Planning for Program Success and Sustainability

Welcome

Welcome to Module 2 in this series of three modules on Communication Planning for Program Success and Sustainability.

To advance to the next slide, click the "NEXT" button in the bottom right corner of each slide.

Credits

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Modules in This Series

The modules in this series are as follows:

Module 1: *Introduction to Strategic Communication Planning*, which covers communication through a social marketing lens, preparing to communicate, a strategic approach to communication planning, assessing your current situation, and setting your communication goals and objectives.

Module 2: *Developing Your Communication Strategy*, which covers identifying your intended audiences, developing and pretesting your messages, and selecting your communication channels, activities, materials, and partnerships.

Module 3: *Moving from Strategy to Action*, which covers developing your communication action plan, creating and pretesting communication materials, and implementing, evaluating, and modifying your communication action plan.

This Module

In module 1 in this series, we introduced the 8-step model for communication planning and focused on Steps 1 and 2, assessing your current situation and setting communication goals and objectives.

This module focuses on Steps 3, 4, and 5: identifying your intended audiences, developing and pretesting messages, and identifying channels, activities, materials, and partnerships. First, though, let's do a brief review of Module 1. Note:

Brief Review of Module 1

In Module 1 in this series, we explored why and how communication can support program implementation and pave the way for sustainability.

We talked about what health communication and social marketing are. While health communication helps you educate and raise your audiences' awareness of programs and services, social marketing goes a step further by aiming to convince audiences to change their behavior.

These modules take a social marketing approach to communication. Raising your audiences' awareness of issues is a great first step, but in order to make real change in communities, you need to keep your focus on *action.*

Module 1 also talked about the fact that communication and social marketing aren't about guessing what will work. As in commercial marketing, you need to really understand your audiences—their needs, values, beliefs, and priorities—so you can craft messages and materials that resonate with them. In order to better understand your audiences, you have to set aside your assumptions and do some research.

Review of Module 1 Continued

Researching your audiences reminds you that not all audiences are alike and that there is no such thing as one size fits all when it comes to communication. The priorities of a single working mom with two young children are not the same as those of a school board member who is up for re-election. You may need to reach both these people, but they won't respond to the same message.

And you'll be asking each of your audiences to do something that's appropriate for the audience to do. For example, you may want to ask the single mom to attend a parenting class. She'll wonder if it will be worth giving up what little time she has to go to the class. She may wonder whether she'll need to find a sitter, and whether she'll be able to afford that. While she's considering those questions, she'll be wondering "What's in it for me?"

On the other hand, you may need to communicate with the school board member to ask her to attend a breakfast meeting so she can learn about your program's plans for sustainability. The school board member may wonder if meeting with you is worth her time when she knows she should be meeting with potential supporters for her reelection campaign. She may also wonder if your program's issues are ones that relate to her platform. Of course, she's also wondering, "What's in it for me?"

We all ask that question on a regular basis. In communication, we call this this the Social Exchange Theory. You need to understand how your audiences are likely to react to what you ask them to do and build that understanding into the way you frame your messages.

All this points to the need to develop a "marketing mindset," which requires that you put your expertise and assumptions aside and put your audiences first.

Review of Module 1 Continued

In the last module, we introduced you to the 8-Step Model for Communication Planning. While planning requires a little time and effort up front, your results are likely to be more powerful than if you don't make the time for planning.

In Module 1, we covered Steps 1 and 2 of the 8-Step Model. In Step 1, you look at where your program is right now, assessing how the community feels about your program, the status of your implementation and sustainability plans, whether you have partners in place, and the availability of resources to carry out a communication plan. In Step 2, you focus on setting realistic communication goals and objectives. If your communication goals and objectives align with your program's priorities, they will be more likely to enhance your program's sustainability. We also showed you how to create SMART communication goals that are Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

With your communication goals and objectives in place, we're ready to move on to Steps 3, 4, and 5—developing your communication strategy. Of course, if you'd like to revisit any of the content covered in Module 1, you can do so at any time.

Step 3: Identify Intended Audiences

At this point, you should have identified at least one critical communication goal. Here in Step 3, you'll identify the intended audiences you need to reach to achieve that goal.

Identifying who your audiences are is often fairly straightforward, but you can't stop there. You also need to determine what you know about your audiences and how you can learn more. What are their values, needs, beliefs, and priorities? You need to answer these questions in order to create messages and materials that resonate with your audiences and persuade them to take action. With a marketing mindset in place, you'll be able to meet them right where they are, right now, with respect.

To do this, you need to set aside your assumptions about your audiences and conduct a little research. In addition to understanding their values, needs, and beliefs, you need to gather some practical information such as:

- Where and how can your audiences be reached? Coalition meetings? Events associated with their faith community? Online? Public forums like city council meetings?
- What sources of information do your audiences trust? Their peers? The media? Do they trust hard data? What about anecdotal stories?
- And how do your audiences like to receive information? Via social media? Email? In person? Broadcast or print news?

Gathering the answers to these questions can make your communication strategy a success. Next, let's dig a little deeper into your audiences.

Segmenting Your Audiences

Let's say your goal is to persuade parents of young children to participate in a program that offers behavioral health screening and referrals to appropriate community-based services. You'll need to divide your intended audience of "parents" into smaller segments.

The broad audience of "parents" can be segmented into smaller groups on the basis of demographics, family size, racial and ethnic considerations, and so forth. Several of these segments can be divided even further. For instance, you wouldn't try to reach many different racial and ethnic groups with the same message.

It's good to be as specific as possible as you describe your intended audiences, which is why segmenting can be so important. If this feels overwhelming, don't worry: you don't have to reach everyone at once. You can absolutely, positively prioritize. In fact, we encourage you to prioritize here and at every step in the communication planning process. Prioritization is strategic. It helps you focus on what needs to happen first, and it enables you to make the best use of your resources.

Describe It This Way

Here's a simple way to define and describe the audience segments you need to reach. "We need to reach blank" (that's an audience) "who already blank" (this is your audience segment, and this phrase describes something that the audience segment already is, or knows, or does).

We'll use this approach to prioritize audience segments for the communication goal we considered earlier—persuading parents of young children to have their child receive a behavioral health screening before kindergarten.

Describe It This Way (Activity)

If your goal is to persuade parents to have their preschool child screened for behavioral health issues before kindergarten, who might be a primary audience? Would it be parents, or children, or pet owners?

And would you be trying to reach individuals who have had their child immunized, or those who have children in middle school, or those who are interested in psychology?

The correct answer is that you would need to reach **parents** who **have had their child immunized**. These parents have already taken steps to ensure that their young child is ready for school and may be receptive to learning about behavioral wellness screening.

Sample Primary Audience Segment

We need to reach parents who already have had their child immunized.

Here's a segment of parents who are already committed to keeping their child safe from communicable disease. They may be ready, willing, and able to take the extra step and have their child screened for behavioral wellness. This could be your primary audience segment, the most important group you would need to reach. Because you may see

good results with this population, you can consider them "low-hanging fruit"–a segment of the parent population that's easier to convince to have their child screened than parents who have not already had their child immunized.

But these parents probably aren't the only audience segment you want to reach.

Sample Secondary Audience Segment

You may also want to reach elementary school principals to persuade them to include behavioral wellness screenings (or at least information about the screenings) as part of their events for parents of entering kindergarteners.

This kind of audience is what we call a "secondary" or "influencer" audience. They can help carry the message to your primary audience.

Describe It This Way (Activity)

You may have several secondary audiences. If your goal is to persuade parents to have their preschool child screened for behavioral health issues before kindergarten, who might be another appropriate secondary audience? Would it be hair stylists, or pediatricians, or social workers?

And would you be trying to reach individuals who cut children's hair, or those who work with troubled students, or those who provide immunizations?

The correct answer is that you would need to reach **pediatricians** who **provide immunizations**. Parents of young children typically trust pediatricians to give them safe, sound guidance. Persuading pediatricians to recommend—and even host—behavioral wellness screenings may significantly increase the number of children who are screened.

Additional Secondary Audience Segment

Reaching out to pediatricians could be another part of your strategy for achieving this goal. While providing check-ups and immunizations, pediatricians could talk with the parents of preschoolers about behavioral wellness as an important part of their child's overall health. If pediatricians won't be providing the screening themselves, they could make an appropriate referral.

At this point, you may be thinking that you'll end up with so many potential audience segments that you won't be able to reach them all. Not to worry–you don't have to reach them all, and you certainly don't have to reach them all at once. Prioritize your intended audiences, putting your focus on those segments you need to reach first to reach your goal.

Get to Know Your Audiences

Now that you've identified your intended audience segments, you'll need to do a little research into what drives and motivates them. Do not skip this important step! As we discussed in Module 1, relying on incorrect assumptions about your audiences can result in communication strategies that really miss the mark.

For example, you may *think* you know why teachers are resisting your new curriculum, but do you *really?*

You may *think* you know why local business leaders care about the issues your program addresses, but do you *really?*

You may *think* you know why parents of preschoolers are reluctant to have their child screened for behavioral wellness, but do you *really?*

It's always worth doing a little audience research before crafting a message for your audience, and this doesn't have to be complex or expensive. You can conduct informal conversations with members of your intended audience segment. If there are individual stakeholders or community leaders who can help you better understand your audience, ask to meet with them for 10 to 20 minutes to talk about the audience segment. This is sometimes referred to as a key informant interview. You could also conduct a focus group with a small sample of your audience. Or you could create a simple online survey using a tool like Survey Monkey and send it to members of your audience segment. Any of these steps can help you gather the information you'll need to map out Steps 4 and 5 of your communication strategy.

Information to Gather About/From Your Audience Segments

No matter how you gather information about your audience segments, you'll need to know what kind of information you're looking for. You should ask questions that will help you figure out the content of your messages, as well as questions that will help you learn how best to deliver your messages.

For instance:

- You may want to begin by finding out if your audience segment knows or cares about the issue you want them to take action on. Their answers will tell you if you need to focus on raising awareness as a first step.
- If you want the audience segment to take a specific action, ask if they'd be willing to take the action. This will tell you if your "ask" is going to be well-received.
- If you discover that there's resistance to taking a specific action, ask your audience segment what would prevent them from taking action. This information can help you craft messages that address barriers to taking action.
- Ask what would make it easier for your audience segment to take action. This may give you ideas for ways to help people take action.
- Find out how and where the audience likes to receive information so you can deliver your messages appropriately.

Step 3 Worksheet

To access the worksheet for Step 3, go to:

http://airhsdlearning.airws.org/508_Step_3_worksheet.docx

This worksheet will help you to:

- Identify your intended audiences and segment them as needed
- Figure out what you know about your audience segments and how you might learn more

Step 4: Develop and Pretest Messages

Now we're ready to tackle Step 4—develop and pretest messages.

Before we consider what an effective message *is*, let's take a moment to think about what an effective message is *not*. A message is *not* a catchy hook like "Got milk?" It's not a slogan like "You're in Good Hands with Allstate" or a tagline like Nike's "Just Do It." Perhaps you and your program partners have talked about creating a mission or vision statement for the program—that's not what we're talking here about either. An effective message has to go deeper than these examples.

All these things—slogans, taglines, hooks, and mission statements—are related tools for helping identify where you want your program to go. But the kind of messages you're going to develop and pretest in your communication plan are messages that educate, raise awareness, and persuade others to take action.

Different Audiences, Different Realities

Consider each of the following potential audience members to learn about their perspectives on behavioral wellness screening for pre-kindergarteners:

State Representative Smith says: "I don't consider education, let alone prevention, a priority."

Principal Davis says: "I've never understood the connection between prevention and test scores."

Ms. Jones, a mom, says: "I want my child to be happy, but I don't want her to be stigmatized."

Different Audiences, Different Realities

Each of these audiences might benefit enormously from what your program has to offer. But since there's no such thing as "one-size-fits-all" communication, you need to respect the unique priorities of each audience and create customized messages for each one.

More Versus Less Effective Messages

Let's compare the qualities of more and less effective messages.

More effective messages use simple, easy-to-understand language. Effective messages also feel real and human, as if they're a kind of story. Your audiences should be able to see themselves or someone they know woven into your words.

More effective messages are culturally and linguistically competent; they respect the values and traditions of the audiences they're intended to reach. And, of course, the most effective messages motivate people to act.

Less effective messages often include information that isn't relevant to the audience. They may be filled with jargon and statistics. For example, terms like "social-emotional learning" and "resiliency" mean a lot to those who work in prevention and mental health promotion, but they're probably meaningless to many of the audiences you want to reach.

Less effective messages often try to change people instead of meeting them where they are. Think about how you feel when someone starts a sentence with the words, "You should . . ." It's hard to listen to anything that comes after those words, isn't it?

Less effective messages tend to come from "experts." In Module 1 of this series, we talked about problems associated with trying to communicate from an expert mindset. Few people like to be told what to do by experts because it often feels as if experts have no idea what other people's lives are like. Your messages need to meet people "where they are."

Effective Messages

The way words make us feel is important. Consider this example. You might know that there's an "estate tax" in the United States that's imposed after people of wealth have died. This tax is assessed before any inheritances can be distributed. You've probably also heard this tax referred to as a "death tax." Estate tax or death tax—which phrase do you think conjures up more feelings?

Positive Statements

Here's another quality of effective messages to keep in mind: replace negative statements with positive ones.

Research in social marketing tells us that audiences aren't likely to change their behavior unless and until they can see the benefits for themselves. And benefits, by their very definition, are positive experiences, aren't they?

Here's an example of a negative statement: "Don't allow students to behave inappropriately in the classroom." A more positive statement would be: "Praise and reward students when they behave appropriately."

In other words, effective messages aren't simply about saying "no" to something. They're about saying "yes" to something *else.*

Values-based Messages Can. . .

There are many methods for crafting a strong message. In this module, we focus on creating values-based messages.

A values-based message aligns your work with your audiences' values and priorities, giving audiences the sense that you "get" where they're coming from. These messages meet audiences where they are, whether they're already on board with your work, need more convincing, have no idea what you're talking about, or seem resistant to your efforts.

Values-based messages can help you describe your program or service with the right amount of detail for your audience. And if you have many programs or services and need to explain "the big picture" to audiences, values-based messages can also help you do that.

Values-based messages—in whole, or in part–can be used in your print materials, presentations, media interviews, meetings with individuals, websites, and more.

Four Components of Values-based Messages

The four components of the values-based messages we will help you to develop are the following:

- First, you need to frame *your* message with *your audience's* values.
- Second, you need to outline the benefits of your solution.
- Third, you will address and overcome any potential barriers your audience might have.
- Fourth, you will recommend a specific, realistic call to action.

Let's look at the first point.

Framing Your Message

A frame is a kind of a filter that helps your audience make sense of what you're saying. And when you *provide* that frame for your audience, you can influence the way your audience sees and feels about your issue.

A good example of message framing can be seen in cable news. The major cable news networks may report the same information, but it is often framed so differently from network to network that it's hard to believe it's the same story. These frames are based in the core values held by each network's audience; they are meant to move the audience to think and, more important, feel a certain way about an issue.

Because humans are most likely to be attracted to others with similar values and beliefs, it should come as no surprise that the audience for each of the cable news networks fully *expects* to hear the news framed in a way that aligns with their core values.

Different Audiences, Different Realities

Earlier we shared an example of three possible intended audiences (a state representative, a school principal, and a mother of a preschool child). Now let's learn more about each of these individual's values and priorities and how to frame a message for them.

State Representative Smith's relevant values are the following: She hasn't typically supported education or prevention, but she sits on the Appropriations Committee and you need her support. She values fiscal responsibility.

One potential message you might frame for Representative Smith would be: "We agree that every dollar we spend needs to be spent responsibly. That's why prevention programs for children are worthwhile. They represent an investment with a rich dividend that we believe you—and your constituents—can support."

Principal Davis's relevant values are the following: He's "old school" and doesn't like change, but he cares very deeply about the success of his students—in school and beyond.

One potential message you might frame for Principal Davis would be: "We fully support your commitment to seeing every child succeed, and that's why prevention is so important. By preventing or addressing problems early, all children can reach their full potential."

The relevant values of Ms. Jones, the mother, are the following: She wants her troubled child to be happy now and have a good shot at happiness throughout her life. But she's worried about the possible stigma related to "mental health" and she wonders if it's a reflection on her parenting skills.

One potential message you might frame for Ms. Jones would be: "Parenting is the hardest job in the world. For all the love you give, you deserve all the resources and support we can offer to help you raise happy, healthy children."

Your Frame Is Their Value

Values are key to successfully framing your message. And it's not about *your* values; it's about the values of *your audiences*.

So how do you figure out the core values of your audience segments? It's not that hard—it's the answer to the fundamental question: *What kind of world do they want to live in?* This is information you can glean from the research you conducted in Step 3.

Let's be clear: there is no such thing as a "wrong" or "bad" value. Everyone is entitled to his or her core values, even if we don't share them. As communicators, it's our job to respect those values and find common ground on which to build our message.

A sample list of values that your audiences might hold includes the following:

- Authentic
- Caring
- Comfortable
- Committed
- Community focused
- Competitive
- Creative
- Diverse
- Educated
- Fair
- Family focused
- Free
- Fun
- Growth oriented
- Honest
- Hopeful
- Innovative
- Just
- Optimistic
- Nurturing
- Pragmatic
- Responsive
- Respectful of privacy
- Responsible
- Safe/secure
- Successful
- Team oriented
- Trusting

Your Frame Is Their Value

When you begin your message by demonstrating that you respect and share a core value that's held by your audiences, you will draw them into the rest of your message. This is particularly helpful when talking with audience segments that might otherwise be hard to persuade. You've "primed the pump," and your audience will be more open to hearing what you have to say next.

Another critical reason for framing your message in your audience's values may surprise you: Their **values** will **always** trump your **facts**. It has nothing to do with logic and everything to do with how humans work.

Think of it this way: have you ever heard the expression "That's my story and I'm sticking to it"? We humans do this all the time. Once we've invested in what *feels* like our truth, which is based in our value system, we are very reluctant to change. A real-world example comes from "The Pepsi Challenge." Starting in 1975, Pepsi conducted blindfolded taste tests to invite people to compare Coke and Pepsi. And even though, year after year, Pepsi advertised that participants preferred the taste of Pepsi to that of Coke, this campaign never really changed consumers' buying behavior.

Why? Because Coke lovers "have their story and they're sticking to it." They prefer Coke not just because of the taste but because of the way it makes them feel about themselves. To quote one of Coca-Cola's old slogans, "It's the real thing." That's how Coke drinkers feel—not just about Coke, but about *themselves* when they drink Coke.

Value Frame Example: The Business Community and Youth Mentoring

The following is an example of a value frame for a message that's intended to persuade business leaders to support youth mentoring in the community: *"We want our youth to have every opportunity to grow up healthy and well and become an asset to our community, including our workforce."*

If your work in Step 3 told you that your audience of business leaders is community-focused and growth-oriented, and believes in responsibility, then this value statement will ring true. In fact, it will feel indisputable to this audience.

A value frame, which tells your audience that you're all on the same page, primes the pump for the rest of your message.

Outline the Benefits to Your Solution

The next component of a values-based message is outlining the benefits to your solution. What does the word "solution" refer to here? Your solution is the program, service, partnership, or policy that you want to promote to this audience. For the parent who is struggling with a child with behavioral health issues, the solution may be a parent skills training program or services specifically for the child.

But it's not enough to tell the parent about the parenting program. You have to demonstrate how it will make his or her life easier. For example, he or she will receive support to improve interactions with the child and learn new strategies for managing the child's behavior. The child is likely to be happier and more successful in school. Dinners are likely to be calmer. The parent will be less likely to lose sleep worrying about the child's future. In other words, describe the benefits in ways that will matter *to him or her*–your audience—not *us*.

Audiences and Benefits

Let's consider some generic audiences and the potential benefits of school-based mental health promotion, violence prevention, and substance abuse prevention programs. It's important to note that these are only general depictions that represent the kind of findings you *might* encounter in your own research. They are not a substitute for finding out how *your* audiences feel.

A student might see the following benefits to the school-based program: "School is fun now, and I'm not afraid to ride the bus anymore."

A parent might see the following benefits to the program: "My child smiles again. Her grades are up, and it's been weeks since we had an argument."

A teacher might see the following benefits to the program: "The kids are much calmer; it's like I've got an extra hour in the day to teach."

A business person might see the following benefits to the program: "When my employees have to leave work to visit their child's school, my business isn't as productive. I'll support programs that can help keep people working from 9 to 5."

A state agency professional might see the following benefits to the program: "Our state agency is interested in any collaborative model that effectively shares resources and gets rid of redundancies."

A law enforcement official might see the following benefits to the program: "Prevention programs make our jobs easier and they remind the community that we're all on the same side."

A family advocacy professional might see the following benefits to the program: "This collaboration can add power to our voices at the state level, and we need that."

A legislator might see the following benefits to the program: "Voters in my district care about safety and education. I'm looking for fiscally responsible programs that align with that."

Outline Benefits to the Business Community in Becoming Engaged in Youth Mentoring

Returning to our youth-mentoring example, here's a sample statement of benefits for an audience of business leaders:

Our successful mentoring program is making an enormous difference in the lives of children and their adult mentors.

We have a classroom full of students who were ready to drop out but are now set to graduate. Four out of five mentors tell us they truly value the experience.

You could provide this kind of experience for your employees today, while helping to create a strong workforce for tomorrow. And we will enthusiastically promote your company's support on our website, in our newsletters, and at our events.

In this statement, the first sentence describes the program: Our successful mentoring program is making an enormous difference in the lives of children and their adult mentors.

The second sentence humanizes the issue: We have a classroom full of students who were ready to drop out but are now set to graduate.

The third sentence presents easy-to-understand data: Four out of five mentors tell us they truly value the experience.

The fourth sentence taps into the audience's value of building a strong workforce: You could provide this kind of experience for your employees today, while helping to create a strong workforce for tomorrow.

And the last sentence describes additional benefits: And we will enthusiastically promote your company's support on our website, in our newsletters, and at our events.

Overcome Potential Barriers

We just saw some pretty good benefits. But we still need to address any objections or barriers businesses might have related to having their employees participate in a youth mentoring program.

This brings us to the third component of values-based messages: overcoming potential barriers.

Think about the reasons why you might say "No" to an opportunity to go out to dinner with friends. One reason might be that you're too busy and can't spare the time. So time is a potential barrier. Perhaps you're saving all your discretionary funds for something important and are trying not to spend money eating out. Clearly, money can be a barrier.

Additional barriers can include cultural norms. And there are less tangible barriers that may need to be overcome. Remember the parent whose child might benefit from counseling? Let's say your counseling services are free, so money wouldn't be a barrier. And they're available at school during the school day, so time isn't a concern.

But we know that this parent is concerned about the possible stigma associated with her child's receiving mental health counseling. That's an example of an intangible barrier.

Outlining the benefits and overcoming potential barriers—the second and third components of values-based messages—relate directly to the Social Exchange Theory and the "what's in it for me" question. To answer this question, you need to highlight the benefits while acknowledging and minimizing the barriers.

Audiences and Barriers

Let's look at the same audiences we considered a little while ago and explore the barriers these audiences may perceive related to school-based mental health promotion, violence prevention, and substance abuse prevention programs.

A student might perceive the following barriers to the school-based program: "This doesn't feel cool. I don't' want the other kids to see me as weird or something."

A parent might perceive the following barriers to the program: "Are you telling me I'm a bad parent? Stay out of my family's business."

A teacher might perceive the following barriers to the program: "I'm already overworked. I can't imagine adding something else to the day."

A business person might perceive the following barriers to the program: "We need to focus on increasing our revenues, not on schools."

A state agency professional might perceive the following barriers to the program: "Our agency has its own way of doing things. Plus, we don't have the time or the staff to try something new."

A law enforcement official might perceive the following barriers to the program: "Our focus isn't on preventing crime, it's on responding to crime."

A family advocacy professional might perceive the following barriers to the program: "Our mission is to support parents and children in the home, not in the school setting."

A legislator might perceive the following barriers to the program: "Children's mental health is not a priority for me or my constituents."

Overcoming Barriers to the Business Community Becoming Engaged in Youth Mentoring

Considering the example of the youth mentoring program that's trying to convince local businesses to become engaged in the program, here's an example of a message that the program could craft to overcome barriers that business leaders might be concerned about:

"If you're concerned that this would be too hard to fit into your business, we can make it easy. We ask only for one hour a week from mentors during the school hear. We're flexible; mentors can meet with youth early in the morning, over lunchtime, or right after school. And we can train your staff here at your company to serve as mentors."

You need to craft messages that make it easy for each of your audience segments to say "yes" to you. But what are they saying "yes" to?

The Call to Action

You want your audience segments to say "yes" to your call to action.

Your call to action needs to be realistic and easy for the audience to respond to. If your audience has never heard of your program, a call to action that requests full financial support for the program is not as realistic as a request for a follow-up meeting to keep the conversation going. Realistic calls to action, over time, can be very helpful in gaining critical support for your program.

For example, in the case of the parent with lingering concerns about having her daughter receive counseling services, a realistic call to action might be to arrange a phone call between the mother and the counselor so that the mother can express her concerns and ask questions.

The following are some additional examples of a call to action:

- Agree to participate in a follow-up phone call
- Introduce you to someone
- Invite you to speak to another group
- Come to a meeting
- Provide services to clients
- Provide financial or in-kind support

Call to Action for the Business Community Becoming Engaged in Youth Mentoring

The following is a call to action from the mentoring program that's reaching out to the local business community:

"We believe your workforce is full of good mentors who would join us if they knew you supported this program. Could we hold a few informational sessions here in your break room during lunch time this month? Perhaps you could help us by promoting these sessions in your employee newsletter. We'd also appreciate it if you would let us hang our posters on your bulletin boards."

There are actually three distinct "asks" in this call to action: holding informational sessions in the break room, promoting the sessions in the employee newsletter, and hanging posters on company bulletin boards.

All three are pretty easy and realistic. The business might not agree to all three, but even one or two of these actions would get things headed in the right direction.

Evaluate a Sample Message

Consider the following message that aims to persuade faith-based leaders to promote your program for teen moms to their congregation:

"Every child is precious and every child deserves an equal chance to succeed in life. We know that education begins at home and parents are a child's first teacher, but not all young parents are ready for the challenge. That's why our program works closely with teen oms to prepare their children for success in school and in life. Our trained social workers offer home visits and counseling sessions by phone. Young mothers learn the skills they need to take care of their babies—and themselves. Will you help us by promoting this program to your congregation? We can provide brochures in several languages."

Is this message positively stated? If you said yes, you're correct. This message is positively stated. It talk about happiness and success for children and their young mothers.

Is this message framed I the values that this audience is likely to hold? If you said yes, you're correct. The message is framed in the values the audience is likely to hold. Faith-based leaders are likely to care about healthy families and children's welfare.

Does this message outline benefits that would be of interest to this audience? Maybe. It describes benefits to teen moms and their children, but the message might need to do more to describe the benefits to the faith-based leaders themselves.

Does this message describe how the program would overcome the audience's potential barriers? If you said no, you're correct. What if this audience is concerned about the privacy of their congregants? The message does not address potential barriers like this. Researching your audience more fully will help you identify and address potential barriers.

Does this message include a realistic call to action? If you said yes, you're correct. The call to action is realistic.

Pretest Your Messages

Now that you've developed a draft message, there's only one thing left to do in this step, and that's to see if it works. How? By pretesting it, whenever possible, with a few members of your audience segment. Ask them if it makes sense, and if it doesn't, change it. Ask them if it inspires them to take action, and if it doesn't, change it. Ask them how it could be improved, and use what you learn to fine tune and strengthen your message.

This isn't a complex process—it's very straightforward, and it's a communication best practice that can make a world of difference.

Review of Step 4

So let's review Step 4.

First and foremost, effective messages meet audiences where they are. Effective messages are simple and free of jargon and complex data, and they humanize the issue. These messages are culturally competent, which involves more than simply translating a message into another language. They are positive, and they tap into the feelings that align with the audiences' core values.

Because values matter so deeply, you need to meet your program's audience segments "where they are" by crafting values-based messages. You start by framing the message in your audiences' values. Then you demonstrate how your program, service, or solution will be of benefit to your audience, while also addressing any potential barriers the audiences may experience. You wrap your message up with a realistic and simple call to action.

Finally, don't forget to pretest your message with members of your audience segment, and use that process to improve the message.

Step 4 Worksheet

To access the worksheet for Step 4, go to:

http://airhsdlearning.airws.org/508_Step_4_worksheet.docx

Building on what you learned about your audience segments in Step 3, this worksheet will help you craft a values-based message that supports your communication goals and objectives.

Step 5

Step 5 is the last step of the model that we cover in this module. This is where you get to do what most people feel is the "fun" part of communication—deciding how to deliver your messages.

You gathered the answers to most, if not all, of the following questions during Step 3, when you identified your intended audiences.

Where does your audience live, work, and play? If your audience is active in a faith community, then adapting your message for inclusion in the faith community's newsletter or website may be a good way to reach them. Maybe you can reach lower-income parents with a flyer on the bulletin board at the laundromat. What about the barber shop, the library, the health clinic, a local tavern, or the community center?

Whom or what does your audience trust? If a state legislator trusts a certain staff member to summarize and present information to him or her, a meeting with that staffer might be a good way to convey your message. Some audiences trust their peers more than anyone else, so finding those human "trusted sources of information" to deliver your message can be a great way to go. Other audiences primarily trust the print or broadcast media, which means that using traditional media would be a good strategy for reaching them.

How does your audience like to receive information? If your audience is online much of the day, then social media, a good website, and e-mail may be the best way to go. Texting can be a good way to reach students and young adults. And let's not forget that in-person, face-to-face meetings and presentations to groups can be the best way to educate or persuade some audiences.

How often/in what ways will your audience need to hear the message? Remember that you may need to deliver your message many times in different ways to the same audience for it to sink in and lead to action. You'll need a range of communication channels, activities, and materials to carry your message over time.

Sample Communication Channels

A communication channel is just that, a path through which a message is delivered. Communication channels can generally be classified as people, places, and things. The following are some examples of communication channels in each of these categories.

People:

- Peers
- Trusted authorities

Places:

- Schools
- Hair salons
- Laundromats
- Libraries
- Places of worship
- Supermarkets
- Doctor's offices

Things:

- Website
- Social media
- TV
- Email
- Radio
- Newspapers
- Magazines

Sample Activities and Events

You may want to deliver your message at events or activities, including the following:

- Media events, such as news conferences and editorial board meetings
- Community events like street festivals, fun runs, and parades
- Business events such as a Chamber of Commerce breakfast
- Professional events such as conferences
- School events such as back-to-school evenings, school board meetings, teacher in-service days, and sporting events

You may decide to connect your message with existing health observances and events such as Children's Mental Health Awareness Day in May. Linking your message to one

or more events can enhance the local media's perception of its newsworthiness, thereby increasing the likelihood that you'll receive media coverage.

Sample Materials

Of course, all or part of your message can be woven into all kinds of materials, including:

- PowerPoint presentations
- Fact sheets or one-pagers
- Media materials like press releases and talking points
- Flyers and posters
- T-shirts and refrigerator magnets
- Public service announcements and videos

Just remember that no matter how you deliver your message, your audiences' preferences should serve as your guide.

Ways to Deliver Messages

You may need to deliver a message more than once and in more than one way in order for your audience to hear it and begin to respond. Frequency and mix are important concepts to keep in mind. Frequency refers to how often you deliver your message, while mix is the different ways in which you deliver it.

Example Mix of Channels

Let's say, for instance, that you'd like to reach families that are low-income and at-risk to tell them about your afterschool programs for elementary and middle-school students. Posting this information to your website might not be enough—in fact, it won't be enough.

You may need to send a flyer home with students. You may need to post information about registration and deadlines on your Facebook page, and ask your partners to share the information on their Facebook pages. You may want to have an information booth at the spring health fair in your community. You may put up posters in local laundromats.

Each of these ideas is low cost. Each enables you to share important information. The mix of these channels is much more likely to reach your audiences than any one channel pursued in isolation. Commercial marketers do this all the time. Advertisers don't buy just one ad to run during the Super Bowl and then hope that you'll remember to buy their product all year long. They continue to promote their product through TV, radio, print media, social media, and point-of-purchase displays throughout the year. Your program doesn't have the advertising budget of a major commercial product, but you can adopt that same thinking to support your work.

Sample Scenario

In this activity, you will consider what might be effective channels, activities, and materials/events for reaching single working mothers with children in preschool to promote your summer program for children ages 3 to 5.

Here's what you have learned about this audience in the community you are serving: They are low-income and frequently work more than one job. They frequently rely on family and friends for child care. They rent apartments more than they own homes. They are predominantly African American with a high school diploma or GED. Their children are generally enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP, and they often rely on SNAP benefits. About half of the audience has a computer at home, and most have a smartphone with which to access the internet.

Which of the following **channels** do you think would be best to reach this audience? (There is no wrong answer.)

- Newspaper/TV/radio
- Laundromat bulletin boards
- Hair salons
- Health care providers
- Social media
- Preschools

Which of the following **materials** do you think would be best to reach this audience? (There is no wrong answer.)

- Posters or flyers
- PowerPoint presentations
- Public service announcements
- Newsletters
- T-shirts
- Infographics

Which of the following activities/events do you think would be best to reach this audience? (There is no wrong answer.)

- Block parties
- Table outside of Walmart
- Professional conference
- Email blast
- Press conference
- One-on-one meetings

Review of Step 5

Step 5, like Step 4, is informed by the work you've done in Step 3 to understand your audiences. As you consider how often and in what ways you'll deliver your message, be guided by your audiences' preferences. Choose communication channels, activities, and materials that align with your audiences' preferences. Consider when and where they are most likely to receive and hear your message and how they like to receive information. Keep in mind the people and other sources of information they trust the most.

We encourage you to download the worksheets associated with this module and use them. Work with your program staff, community partners, and other stakeholders at every step along the way to identify and learn about your audiences, craft your messages, and choose the most effective methods for delivering your messages.

Step 5 Worksheet

To access the worksheet for Step 5, go to:

http://airhsdlearning.airws.org/508_Step_5_worksheet.docx

This worksheet will help you map out the best channels, materials, activities, and events for your objectives and your audiences.

Module 2 Review

Let's do a brief recap of this module.

We began with a review of core communication concepts, including the marketing mindset and the social exchange theory. We then walked through Steps 3, 4, and 5 of the 8-Step Model for Communication Planning.

Step 3 explored how to understand and segment your intended audiences. Step 4 presented a four-step approach to crafting values-based messages. And, finally, in Step 5, we considered ways to reach your audiences so they'll be receptive to your message.

Coming Up in Module 3

In the final module in this series, Module 3, you'll learn how to put your communication plan into action. Well offer options for developing an action plan that works for you, your staff, and your partners. We'll talk about developing and pretesting the materials you identified in Step 5. We'll review how to implement and monitor your communication efforts so that you can make adjustments and improve your outcomes. Finally, we'll consider how communication planning is a process that doesn't end, but becomes more focused and refined over time. We hope you'll join us.