



# HEALTH EQUITY COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES AND PLANNING GUIDE

## INTRODUCTION

Developing a communication plan can help focus your organization's message(s) and reach your target audience. A plan can also influence the efficiency and simplicity of your communication methods. This tool looks at what a communication plan entails, how and when to create one, and how to use a communication plan to raise awareness about your issue, event, or project. This tool can be used to outline strategies and tools for effective communication, ensuring your mission of fostering health equity reaches every corner of your community.

## MAKING THE CASE FOR A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Communities should use a communications plan for all forms of communication from websites to capital campaigns because it provides structure, direction, and effectiveness enabling it to better serve its audience, fulfill its mission, and contribute meaningfully to its goals and objectives.

## BENEFITS OF A COMMUNICATION PLAN

- Clarity of Objectives
- Audience Engagement
- Efficient Resource Allocation
- Organizational Alignment

## USING A DATA-DRIVE APPROACH

*How can data be used to create a communications plan?*

To develop a communications plan, data can be utilized in various ways to inform and guide the development of effective strategies. In the context of community participation in development planning, baseline data is essential for developing disaster risk management strategies and community disaster resilience. Also, in the context of community-based implementation strategies, systematic and formal communication strategies, informed by data, can facilitate staff buy-in and support. Enhancing the implementation of evidence-based practices in community settings.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The following steps are needed to effectively reach the target audience and achieve the organization's goals. Implementing this outlines the strategies, messages, and channels you will use to engage with your stakeholders, promote health equity, and raise awareness about your services.

- **Executive Summary:** This is a concise overview that summarizes the essential elements of the plan, highlighting its objectives, strategies, and anticipated outcomes.
  - Objective: The primary goal of the communication plan is to promote health equity in Vermont through our website, educating, engaging, and connecting with our target audience.
  - Target Audience: List your target audience, e.g., policymakers, healthcare professionals, underserved communities, the general public.
  - Key Messages: Identify the main messages you want to convey.
    - Examples: "Creating a Healthier Vermont Together" , "Community Empowerment for Health Equity"
- **Consistency and Branding:** Consistency helps build trust and credibility among users
  - Maintain consistency in tone, style, and branding across all communication materials to reinforce the identity of the organization.
  - Example in a **newsletter** blurb: Welcome to the November edition of the Vermont Healthy Communities Newsletter! In this issue, dive into stories of community empowerment, health equity initiatives, and collaborative efforts shaping a healthier

Vermont. Explore insights from healthcare experts, get involved in upcoming events, and join our collective journey towards equitable healthcare access for all Vermonters. Your commitment makes a difference!

- Example in a **social media** post.

Platforms: **Facebook/X/Twitter/Instagram**

We're excited to share stories of impact and change in our community! Vermont Healthy Communities continues its commitment to #HealthEquity and empowerment for all. Join us in advocating for a fairer, healthier Vermont. Together, we can make a difference! #CommunityHealth #VermontHealthyCommunities

- Both examples align in tone, conveying a welcoming and inclusive message. They incorporate similar themes, emphasizing community engagement, health equity, and the organization's commitment to creating a healthier Vermont
- **Situational Analysis:** This serves as a tool for organizations to comprehensively assess their current status, make informed decisions, identify opportunities and risks, allocate resources efficiently, and align strategies with objectives for future success and adaptability.
  - SWOT Analysis: Conduct a SWOT analysis to understand your organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.
  - Competitor Analysis: Identify and assess key competitors in the health equity space.
  - Audience Analysis: Understand your audience's needs, preferences, and demographics.
- **Goals and Objectives:**
  - *Goals* can be general and broad statements that define the overall purpose or aim of a project, campaign, or organization. They are typically long-term. *Example:* Improve access to healthcare services for underserved communities.
  - *Objectives* are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. They outline specific steps or milestones that contribute to achieving the broader goals. They are more immediate and tangible compared to goals. They provide clear, actionable steps that can be accomplished within a specific

timeframe. *Example:* Host three community health workshops by the end of the year.

- Goal 1: Increase awareness of health disparities in Vermont.
  - Objective 1.1: Increase website traffic by X% within [timeframe].
  - Objective 1.2: Achieve a click-through rate of X% on key health equity articles.

- **Strategies:**

- Content Strategy: Develop and curate relevant, high-quality content that educates and engages your audience.
- Social Media Strategy: Utilize social media platforms to share content, raise awareness, and engage with the community.
- Email Marketing Strategy: Build and segment email lists for targeted outreach.
  - Platforms like Mailchimp can help with email marketing, distributing newsletters, etc.

- **Key Messages:** They capture the essence of an organization's communication strategy. They play an important role in shaping perceptions, building brand identity, and fostering effective communication with the intended audience.

Develop clear and concise key messages that encapsulate the mission and goals of the organization regarding health equity

- Message 1: Promoting Inclusive Health for All]
- Message 2: Empowering Communities Through Education and Collaboration]
- Message 3: Building a Supportive Network for Health Equity Advocacy]

- **Channels:**

- Website: Regularly update and optimize the Vermont Health Equity website.
- Social Media: Utilize platforms like Facebook, 'X'/Twitter, and LinkedIn.
- Email: Implement email marketing campaigns.
- Events: Organize webinars, workshops, or community events.

- **Tactics and Activities:**

- Content Calendar: Plan a schedule for creating and publishing content on the website.
  - Social Media Calendar: Schedule regular posts and engage with the audience.
    - Software that can help manage content and social media are Sprout, Hootsuite, Loomly, and Zoho
  - Email Campaigns: Develop email campaigns, newsletters, and updates.
- **Metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** They provide insights, guide decision-making, track progress, demonstrate effectiveness, and drive continuous improvement.
    - Key Performance Indicators: [e.g., website traffic, engagement rates, email open rates]

Example: **Website engagement rate**

*Objective:* Increase engagement and interaction on the Vermont Healthy Communities website to raise awareness and educate the community about health equity initiatives.

*Measurement:* Calculate the website engagement rate as the percentage of visitors who interact with the site beyond just landing on the homepage. This includes metrics such as time spent on the site, pages visited per session, and interactions with specific content or resources.

By focusing on website engagement, Vermont Healthy Communities can assess the effectiveness of their online content and user experience.

**Example: Social Media Engagement Rate**

*Objective:* Increase engagement and interaction across Vermont Healthy Communities' social media platforms to amplify the reach and impact of health equity messaging.

*Measurement:* Calculate the social media engagement rate by dividing the total engagement (likes, comments, shares) by the total number of followers and multiplying by 100 to get a percentage.

- Target: Achieve a 25% increase in the overall social media engagement rate across all platforms within three months.
  - Measurement Tools: Google Analytics, social media insights, email marketing software.
- **Timeline:** A timeline provides structure, organization, and a roadmap for implementing strategies, managing resources effectively, staying on track with deadlines, and ensuring the successful execution of initiatives.
    - Create a detailed timeline for the execution of each tactic and activity.
  - **Budget:** A budget facilitates efficient resource allocation, cost management, decision-making, performance evaluation, and ensures that communication strategies are aligned with available financial resources
    - Allocate resources for each strategy and tactic, including content creation, social media advertising, and event planning.
  - **Stakeholders:** They bring diverse expertise, support, credibility, audience insights, and collaboration  
 Examples: Community members, healthcare organizations serving the community, nonprofit organizations or advocacy groups, government representatives, educators, community leaders, funders or donors
    - Identify key team members responsible for executing the plan.
  - **Accessibility and Inclusivity:**
    - Ensure that communication materials, including the website, are accessible to diverse audiences, including individuals with disabilities.
  - **Risk Management:** Helps in identifying, assessing, and addressing potential risks that could affect the success and impact of communication efforts
    - Anticipate potential risks and outline strategies for mitigating them.

- **Evaluation and Review:**
    - Schedule regular reviews to assess the plan's effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.
    - Maintain thorough documentation of communication plans, strategies, and results for future reference and reporting purposes.
  - **Appendices:**
    - Include any supporting documents, research, or templates.
  - **Contact Information:**
    - Provide contact details for team members and stakeholders involved in the plan
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## SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION PLAN EXAMPLE

The following steps are needed to effectively leverage digital platforms to raise awareness, educate, and engage with your target audience.

- **Executive Summary:**
  - **Objective:** The primary goal of this communication plan is to utilize social media to promote health equity in Vermont, raise awareness, and engage with our target audience.
  - **Target Audience:** [List your target audience, e.g., policymakers, healthcare professionals, underserved communities, the general public.]
- **Key Messages:** [Identify the main messages you want to convey.] Tailoring key messages for various social media platforms is crucial for resonating with each platform's audience and communication style
  - **'X'/Twitter:** Key Message: "Join the movement towards #HealthEquity in Vermont! Our community-led initiatives are driving positive change. Follow us for updates on workshops, resources, and opportunities to make a difference. #VermontHealthyCommunities"

- **Facebook:** Key Message: "Discover stories of impact! Vermont Healthy Communities is committed to fostering health equity. Follow our page for engaging articles, event announcements, and ways to get involved. Together, we're building a healthier Vermont! #CommunityWellness"
- **Instagram:** Key Message: "Health is a journey, and we're here to empower you every step of the way! Follow us for inspiring visuals, wellness tips, and stories of resilience. Let's create a healthier, more equitable Vermont together! #HealthyLiving #VermontStrong"
- **LinkedIn:** Key Message: "Join Vermont Healthy Communities' network of changemakers! Our efforts towards health equity impact communities statewide. Follow us for thought leadership articles, professional insights, and opportunities to collaborate. Together, let's drive change! #PublicHealth #PlaceMaking"
- **Situational Analysis:**
  - SWOT Analysis: Understand your organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats in the context of social media.
  - Competitor Analysis: Identify and assess key competitors in the health equity and social media space.
  - Audience Analysis: Understand your audience's social media preferences, demographics, and behavior.
- **Goals and Objectives:** They would need to be tailored to the specific characteristics and audience engagement expectations of each platform ensuring a focused approach towards achieving measurable outcomes.
  - **Example 'X'/Twitter**
    - *Goal:* Increase engagement and awareness about health equity initiatives in Vermont through 'X'/Twitter.
    - *Objective:* Increase followers by 20% within six months.
  - **Example Instagram**
    - *Goal:* Showcase the impact of health equity initiatives visually and engage the community on Instagram.
    - *Objective:* Achieve a 25% increase in followers within six months.



- Example **Facebook**
  - *Goal:* Foster community engagement and discussion about health equity efforts on Facebook.
  - *Objectives:*
    - Increase page likes by 15% within a year.
    - Encourage 20 shares per month of success stories or educational content related to health equity initiatives.
  
- Example **Newsletter**
  - *Goal:* Educate and update subscribers about health equity initiatives and community impact in Vermont.
  - *Objective:* Increase newsletter subscribers by 30% within the first quarter through targeted sign-up campaigns.
  
- **Strategies:**
  - Content Strategy: Develop and curate compelling and informative content that educates and engages your audience.
  - Community Engagement Strategy: Foster a sense of community and two-way communication with your followers.
  - Paid Promotion Strategy: Utilize social media advertising to expand your reach.
  
- **Social Media Platforms:**
  - Facebook Strategies
    - Engaging Visual Content: Share visually appealing content, including images, infographics, and videos that highlight success stories, community events, or health equity initiatives.
    - Interactive Posts: Create interactive content like polls, quizzes, or surveys related to health equity topics. Encourage audience participation and discussions to foster engagement.
    - Event Promotion: Utilize Facebook Events to promote workshops, seminars, or community health events organized by Vermont Healthy Communities.
    - Behind-the-Scenes Content: Share behind-the-scenes glimpses of the organization's work, team members, or ongoing projects.

- Educational Resources: Share informative articles, resources, or blog posts addressing health equity issues, healthcare access, or tips for healthy living in Vermont. Provide valuable information that resonates with the audience.
  - Live Video Sessions: Conduct live Q&A sessions, interviews with experts, or discussions on health equity topics. Live videos tend to attract higher engagement and allow for real-time interaction with the audience.
- 'X'/Twitter Strategies
    - Hashtag Campaigns: Create and promote dedicated hashtags related to health equity initiatives in Vermont. Encourage followers to use these hashtags when discussing related topics or sharing experiences.
    - 'X'/Twitter Chats: Host 'X'/Twitter chats focusing on health equity discussions. Invite experts, community members, or stakeholders to participate in scheduled conversations, allowing real-time engagement and information sharing.
    - Visual Storytelling: Utilize images, infographics, and short videos to visually communicate messages about health equity, community events, or success stories.
    - Community Engagement Polls: Conduct polls to gather opinions or insights on health-related topics, community needs, or preferences related to health equity initiatives in Vermont.
    - Shareable Content: Share links to informative articles, blog posts, or resources on health equity, wellness tips, and community-driven initiatives.
    - Partnership Highlights: Highlight collaborations and partnerships with other organizations, community leaders, or healthcare providers working towards health equity in Vermont.
  - Instagram Strategies
    - Visual Storytelling: Leverage high-quality images and videos to showcase the impact of health equity initiatives in Vermont.
    - Educational Infographics: Share informative infographics or carousel posts highlighting key statistics, tips, or facts

- User-Generated Content (UGC): Encourage community members to share their stories, experiences, or photos related to health and wellness using Vermont Healthy Communities' dedicated hashtags.
  - Instagram Stories: Utilize Stories to share behind-the-scenes content, event highlights, or quick health tips
  - Partnership Highlights: Showcase collaborations and partnerships with other organizations, influencers, or community leaders.
  - Event Promotion
  - Community Spotlights: Feature spotlight posts highlighting individuals or organizations making a difference.
  - Consistent Aesthetic: Maintain a cohesive visual aesthetic by using a consistent color palette, theme, or style that aligns with your brands identity.
- LinkedIn Strategies
    - Share insightful articles, research findings, or whitepapers related to health equity initiatives.
    - Highlight Success Stories: Share success stories, case studies, or testimonials showcasing the impact of health equity initiatives in Vermont.
    - Networking and Partnerships: Engage with professionals, organizations, and influencers in the healthcare, public health, and community development sectors.
    - Thoughtful Articles and Insights: Publish original articles or posts discussing trends, challenges, or opportunities in achieving health equity.
    - Showcase Partnerships: Highlight collaborations and partnerships with healthcare providers, community organizations, or academic institutions.
- **Content Calendar:** It is an important tool that fosters consistency, strategic planning, efficiency, and audience engagement.
    - Create a detailed content calendar outlining what content will be posted when and on which platforms. The content calendar can be created in a spreadsheet such as Excel, Google Sheets, or SharePoint. Get started with building out your content calendar using the template below.

## Content Calendar Template

	Platform Post (including hashtags)							
Post Title	Facebook	'X'/Twitter	Instagram	TikTok	Newsletter	Images	Scheduled Date	Responsible Party

- Metrics and KPIs:** Important in evaluating performance, understanding the audience, optimizing content, justifying investments, refining strategies, and ensuring that social media efforts align with organizational goals for sustained growth and impact.
  - Key Performance Indicators: [e.g., engagement rates, follower growth, click-through rates]
  - Measurement Tools: Social media analytics platforms.
    - Sprout, Hubspot, Hootsuite

Figure 1. Example Social Media Analytics Dashboard



- Budget:**
  - Allocate resources for content creation, social media advertising, and any tools or software.
- Stakeholders:**

- Identify key team members responsible for social media management.
- **Risk Management:** It is important to safeguard an organization's reputation, ensure compliance, maintain secure communication, handle crises effectively, and foster positive relationships with the audience/followers.
  - Anticipate potential risks (e.g., negative comments, social media crises) and outline strategies for managing them.
- **Evaluation and Review:**
  - Schedule regular reviews to assess the effectiveness of your social media plan and make necessary adjustments.
- **Contact Information:**
  - Provide contact details for team members and stakeholders involved in the plan.

## REFERENCES

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