**ABOUT THIS TEMPLATE**

This template is designed to help you develop your communication plan. It will walk you though key steps, such as, writing your goals, objectives, strategies, and audience specific messaging . It also provides basic information on communication principles, flow, media strategies, and message development (key talking pts).

**SET YOUR GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

Goal statements answers the question: Why do you need a communication plan?

The overarching goal of any communication plan is to build support among community stakeholders for your cause and project.

Objectives answer the questions: What will your stakeholders do to show support for your cause and project and how will you know that your communication plan is effective?

They may include such actions as signing letters of support, coordinating services, referring participants, or information sharing with members of a stakeholder sector.

**EXAMPLE GOALS & OBJECTIVES**

* Address issues of accountability and the case for support
* Explain who we are and how/why we do what we do
* Influence changes with policy makers to improve support for people who inject drugs and harm reduction philosophy
* Influence support for SSP policy and programs
* Increase media and general public understanding of harm reduction and SSPs

|  |
| --- |
| **YOUR GOAL STATEMENT** |
|  |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| **YOUR OBJECTIVES** |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

**DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATION PLAN**

Your communication strategy will help support your goal and objectives through sharing your message clearly and consistently with all your stakeholders – internal and external. A strategic communications plan can help all your stakeholders stay informed and engaged. It can ensure effective and accurate information goes out to media and other interested stakeholders. Implement your plan like any other work plan with specific activities, timeframes, and responsible staff. Adjust your plan as needed.

***See pages 5 – 8 for more information on communication principles, message development, media outlets, media tools, and media relationships.***

* Define the overriding message
	+ Keep it simple. It is the anchor of all your messages
	+ Make sure that everyone involved in operations knows how to share the message in their day-to-day activities
* Know your stakeholder audiences’ communication needs and concerns
	+ These include both internal and external stakeholders
	+ Internal stakeholders are people involved with the operation of the project. They usually include staff, volunteers, peer workers and board members. Messages may differ based on stakeholder role in operations
	+ External stakeholders include anyone you want to positively engage in your project, such as, SSP participants, community partners, community social services, healthcare providers, the general public, public officials, law enforcement and first responders, the media.
* Use your communication/media outlets – local and Internet based – deliberately
	+ Match media outlets with stakeholder audience communication preference. There are often more than one.
	+ Develop relationships with local press, particularly health and community safety reporters
	+ Have an op-ed strategy that includes informational and supportive submissions from stakeholders
	+ Leverage your budget wisely
* Create a calendar for regular and routine communication
	+ Repetition of your message is important. It helps people understand what you are doing and it moves them toward adopting the message as their own. Building rapport and support takes time.
* Encourage feedback from your stakeholder audiences
	+ Always include an invitation and information to contact you
	+ Hold ‘town hall’ forums
	+ Ask to participate in other community events; become part of the community and be accessible

|  |
| --- |
| **YOUR COMMUNICATION PLAN** |
| Overriding Message |
|  |
| Basic and key questions all staff and board should be able to answer |
| **Question** | **Your Response** |
| What is harm reduction and why is it needed? |  |
| What is an SSP?  |  |
| How many SSPs exist in our county/state? |  |
| How long have SSPs been in existence? |  |
| Why do we need an SSP in our community? |  |
| How do SSPs serve to improve public health? |  |
| What happens at an SSP? |  |
| Don’t SSPs encourage drug use? |  |
| Won’t SSPs increase dirty needles in the community?  |  |
| *Other information about your SSP or questions you commonly here.* |  |
| Stakeholder Group | Information Needs & Concerns | Preferred Media |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| Media Outlets | Key Contact |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Calendar |
| **Date** | **Message** | **Media** |
| Jan |
| Feb |
| Mar |
| Apr |
| May |
| Jun |
| Jul |
| Aug |
| Sept |
| Oct |
| Nov |
| Dec |
| Stakeholder Feedback  |
| **Method/Forum** | **Stakeholder Group** | **Frequency** |
| Survey |  |  |
| Focus Groups |  |  |
| Town Hall Forums |  |  |
| *Other?* |  |  |
|  |  |

**SOME BASIC INFORMATION**

**ABOUT COMMUNICATIONS**

There are numerous resources on communication planning. Plans and messages differ dependent upon your community and stakeholder audience/s. Listed below are some common denominators.

* Effective communication plans and messages are rooted in purpose.
* Communication plans are bi-directional.
	+ Your strategy, messages, and media are most effective when stakeholders have channels by which they can communicate their questions, feedback, and information needs to you.
	+ Their needs are important to shaping your plan and messages.
* Information should be clear and relevant to your stakeholders.
	+ The over-riding message may be the same for all, but the method, emphasis, and tone may differ depending on the stakeholder group and what is important to them.
* Your communication should be concise and complete.
	+ Your audience should know why you are telling them something and what you want them to do with that information.
	+ This helps to build confidence and a positive relationship with your stakeholders.
	+ It can also spur action and make it less likely that people will fill in information gaps with rumor and speculation.
* Avoid the use of jargon. It tends to foster in-group and out-group dynamics.
	+ Your communication should strive to be inclusive and accessible to all your audiences.
* Mix and match your communication media approach to reach and meet your stakeholder needs.
* Your communication activity should be planned, documented, delivered, and results tracked.
	+ You want to know what works and doesn’t work so that you don’t repeat mistakes and you do repeat successes.

**MEDIA OUTLETS**

*Source: Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program*

* Radio
* Television
* Newspapers
* Magazines
* Inserts and flyers
* Web sites
* E-mail
* Internet marketing
* Cable television
* Direct mail
* Signage and Outdoor Advertising – billboards or bus boards
* Brochures
* Newsletters
* Infographics
* Human service sector publications
* Specialty items (hats, t-shirts, mugs, pens, bags, pins etc.)
* Opinion Editorials (newspaper, online columns)
* Blogs

**MEDIA TOOLS**

*Source: Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program*

* Media releases
* Media/press conferences, Q&As and photo opportunities
* Backgrounders
* Interviews and talk shows
* Feature articles

**MEDIA RELATIONS**

*Source: Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program*

A first step to help ensure leadership and implementation of a more formal media relations approach would be to assign an individual to take responsibility for coordinating public communications and media relations. This individual would need to be very familiar with operations, and will need quick, easy access to senior officials and board members, as well as an awareness of how decisions are made and the reasons for them. Health Units may have a person charged with this responsibility, however many SSP managers deal with media relationships in addition to their other responsibilities.

Key steps to considered:

### Build Relationships With The Media

SSPs need to understand the needs of the news media, and how that intersects with the organization’s own communications desires. To understand how best to get the message out, one also needs a sense of which news media local residents use most often to obtain information about health care.

SSPs also need to know whether they are dealing effectively with news reporters and how to improve. They should consider how to pitch stories about elements of the operation that might obtain better attention if their worth and work was known.

### Educate Staff on Dealing With The Media

SSPs need to be clear on who is delegated to respond to media inquiries. As appropriate in each SSP, staff should be educated on the needs of the media and coached on how to respond so as to present their message effectively. This involves such issues as being prompt in returning calls, accurate in the delivery of information, considerate of the role of the news media, and be positive, credible and courteous even when the weight of stories seem to be going against the organization. Individuals need to be crisp and clear in getting their message out.

You may decide you are not prepared to conduct an interview on the spot. It is appropriate to ask the interviewer the focus of their inquiry and ask if you can call them back. You will want to negotiate with the interviewer for a call back time that works for them, respecting their deadlines. Take some time to prepare yourself. In preparation you may want to make a few notes, review organizational policy and review the Q&A component of this document. When returning the call find a quiet place away from distractions.

### Preparing for a Media Interview: Know Your Message

* In general: do your homework, know your stuff, and be prepared.
* Anticipate all possible questions, both “good” and “bad,” easy and tough.
* Know what message you want to get across in the interview:
	+ Prepare your key points and the specific details, examples and illustrations that will support them.
	+ Look for ways to make your key points memorable.
	+ Boil your message down into brief, clear, positive sentences that are free of jargon or insider knowledge.
	+ Collect or prepare supporting material (media releases, brochures, fact sheets, backgrounders and so on) that you can give to the reporter.
* Think through your answers for the tough questions, especially the ones you hope the media won’t ask you.
* Know what information can be released (and by whom).
* Remember that the reporter’s job is to fairly and professionally serve the interests of their readers, listeners or viewers, whether those interests are the same as yours or not.
* Honestly question your own position (especially on emotional or controversial issues) -- the media strive to be fair and will want to see both sides.
* Prepare notes, especially on statistics, but don’t necessarily memorize them -- you want to be able to refer to them easily and naturally.
* In some instances, if the interview involves controversy, it may be useful for you to have a “hot seat” practice session with your colleagues prior to the interview.
* Know today’s news and latest developments.
* Never reply with “no comment”.