

Strategic communications in a nutshell

LPHA FALL CONFERENCE | NOVEMBER 2023

Strategic communications is:
 Getting the right information to the right people at the right time
 Consistent, intentional, purposeful ▪ Focused on audience needs and values

What is strategic communications?

Yes	No
✓ Driven by needs of specific audience[s] (the group[s] of people you’re trying to reach)	✗ Driven by need for a product, an organizational need, a grant requirement
✓ Focused on what an audience needs to know , why they might care , what you want them to do	✗ Brain dump of all relevant information for a project or program
✓ Leads with framing and shared values	✗ Leads with data, own goals of program/agency
✓ Proactive (and sometimes reactive)	✗ Mostly reactive
✓ Considering how products and timing meet audiences’ needs and creating content to match	✗ How we do our everyday work and the information we share with each other as a result

Why is strategic communications important?

- **Build public support** for public health’s role and value in creating healthy communities
- **Cut through the noise** in an overwhelming digital and partisan world
- **Fight dominant narratives** of what public health is vs. what others think it is
- **Frame issues ourselves** so we can choose how and when to share information, for maximum impact
- **Meet people where they’re at** to ensure we’re meeting their needs (not just our needs)
- **Connect with communities** and engage authentically

Why start with audiences?

Audience must understand and care in order to act.

- **Different audiences have different values and priorities:** If we don’t speak to their values or priorities, they won’t remember what we say and won’t do what we suggest or ask.
- **We’re feeling creatures, first and foremost:** Our feelings inform our actions even more than our thoughts do.
- **Some things we do or say might challenge preconceived ideas or beliefs:** It can be hard to convince people to act in a community’s best interests over what they perceive to be their own best interest.
- **Different audiences access different sources, and trust different messengers:** Research shows the person I trust most to deliver a message is someone who looks, talks, and acts like me.

Components of a strategic communications plan

<p>Agree on expectations, scope, roles, responsibilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Roles and responsibilities: Who's responsible for determining scope of project? Who are key decision-makers? Who carries out the work? Who are consulting SMEs? Who are key partners we need to keep informed? (Special considerations: writing, design, data analysis, translation, cross-cultural communication, etc.) ▪ How to work together: How frequently does this group want to meet moving forward to discuss communications, and who should be part of those discussions? ▪ Storage: Where are you storing your products and content while you work on them, or when you're finished? Can others from your team get to them without asking you, in case they want to use them too?
<p>Conduct an audit</p>	<p>For this project/topic/program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which audiences see which content? What do they think of it? ▪ What do we or others do now, to whom, how, and how often? ▪ Is that enough? Who's missing?
<p>Brainstorm audiences and frames</p>	<p>Questions to ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who do you want to reach? Get specific; "the general public" is too broad to be helpful (you can't be everything to everyone). ▪ What do you want each audience to know? ▪ Why does each audience care about this topic/project/program? What motivates them? What do they value? ▪ What do you want each audience to do when it comes to this project/topic/program? <p>As you go:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If you're not sure, ask someone who might know. ▪ Who do you struggle to reach? Who needs extra effort on your part? ▪ Streamline if it makes sense: Do your audiences fall into natural groups as you go, because you reach them in the same way, they need to know the same thing, and/or they share similar values/messengers? ▪ Who do you need to prioritize? Who are you aiming at first (primary audience)? Who's coming along for the ride but isn't who you're aiming at (secondary audience)? <p>Frames:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Given what each audience cares about, how could you talk about this program in a way that's meaningful to them? ▪ What metaphors, stories, examples, or rationales could speak to each audience?

Brainstorm big ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What’s most important to communicate? ▪ What’s less important but we don’t want to fall off the table? ▪ What’s challenging to communicate that we need to work on? 		
Consider interim/ process updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What points in the process can we communicate out? Connect audience to process points. ▪ What activities or events are on the horizon that need special attention? ▪ What everyday things do we want to communicate regularly? ▪ Which partners need key updates, and who’s responsible for sharing them? 		
Engage with audiences, partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How can you build in partner/audience feedback, now/once or on an ongoing basis? ▪ Consider key informant interviews ▪ Ask partners and audiences: What do they need? How would they use it? ▪ Where do you fall on the <u>IAP2 spectrum of public participation</u>? 		
Set objectives and goals	<p>Objectives inform key indicators, which in turn inform metrics.</p> <p>Set objectives: What does success look like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agree together on objectives across your team. ▪ Base objectives on what you want your audience to do. ▪ Write objectives specific to communications. ▪ Ask: What does success look like? What does failure look like? <p>Choose key indicators: What shows progress toward objectives?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Be specific: Choose measurable indicators like “visits to a webpage” or “opened newsletters.” ▪ Indicators like “inform,” “educate,” and “raise awareness” are less measurable (if at all). <p>Identify metrics of key indicators: How can we measure progress? What number/proportion indicates success or failure?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quantitative outcome metrics: Survey feedback; newsletter opens and clicks, newsletter subscribers; social media likes, clicks, views, etc.; completion rate of action item/request ▪ Qualitative outcome metrics: Survey feedback; verbal/ad hoc feedback; website audience shadowing; interviews; clarifying questions received ▪ Process metrics (RBA): What did we do and how much? How well did we do it? ▪ Efficiency metrics: Speed/frequency of pushing out content (may not always be appropriate); bottlenecks in process to resolve before/during project (e.g., translation) 		
Sketch out timeline and major products	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Types of products (places where content lives):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Websites, dashboards ▪ Videos, photos, podcasts ▪ Fact sheets, reports ▪ Presentations ▪ Where else? </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do we have capacity for now? What can we sustain in the future? ▪ Do we need to hire contractor(s)? ▪ Who does audience trust? ▪ How formal do we need to be? ▪ Do we need to align with event(s) or holiday(s)? </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Types of products (places where content lives):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Websites, dashboards ▪ Videos, photos, podcasts ▪ Fact sheets, reports ▪ Presentations ▪ Where else? 	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do we have capacity for now? What can we sustain in the future? ▪ Do we need to hire contractor(s)? ▪ Who does audience trust? ▪ How formal do we need to be? ▪ Do we need to align with event(s) or holiday(s)?
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<p>Create products and content</p>	<p>Logistics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign creation to team, SMES, communications staff. Consider partner role in co-creating or sharing each other’s content/products. <p>Consider different methods; layer them on top of each other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bite, snack, meal: When different audiences need different levels/depths of info Dig in: Bite, snack, meal: Are you making your web content digestible? (Mighty Citizen) Hope, agency, dignity: When we want to empower audiences Dig in: Opinion: I stopped reading the news. Is the problem me – or the product? (Washington Post) Inverted pyramid: When folks definitely won’t read the whole thing Dig in: The inverted pyramid structure (Purdue Online Writing Lab) Storytelling: When we want to walk in someone else’s shoes Dig in: Learning Freytag’s Pyramid: 5 cool examples of how to use it in marketing (ClearVoice); Putting systems in your stories (Radical Communicators Network) Feynman technique: We need to simplify, or can’t rely on jargon Dig in: The Feynman Technique: The best way to learn anything (Farnam Street) 	
<p>Run campaign</p>	<p>Types of vehicles (how people get to content and products):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email, newsletter Meetings, events Social media Partners, influencers How else? 	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tone, voice Language, translation Cross-cultural communication Digital accessibility Delivering same content multiple ways (strategically reusing)
<p>Evaluate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use objectives, indicators, and metrics to evaluate campaigns and communications. 	

Accessibility and equity

“Bake in” accessibility and equity from the start.

- Understand your audiences’ values and beliefs;** that affects how they interpret your messaging and content.
- Involve community partners early and often;** they are experts of their lived experience. What do they want to know? What are we leaving out? What frames resonate? Who do they trust for information and help?
- Consider how your audiences communicate,** and how/where they take in and share information.
- Budget time and money for translation, video, printing,** because it’s hard to add those costs on at the end.
- Use plain language** (but don’t dumb it down); use words that your audience can connect to.
- Make sure your staff can easily find and use accessibility and equity resources.**
- Revisit, reassess, keep doing better.** What went well? Where could we improve?



Working with your friendly neighborhood communicator

Do	Don't
✓ Start early, invite often	✗ Wait until the end
✓ Make connections	✗ Stay in siloes
✓ Edit and suggest	✗ Assume our word is law
✓ Help protect their time	

Making the case for strategic communications

- **Provides good return on investment:** Gets your information in front of the right people from the start, instead of guessing or hoping.
- **Strengthens work of other programs:** Shares your agency's important work, helps facilitate a feedback loop on your programs, strengthens connections with other partners.
- **Builds public support:** Helps others understand the role and value of public health, which can build community or policymaker support for your work.

Dig in: More resources

Online:

- [PHRASES \(Public Health Reaching Across Sectors\)](#)
- [FrameWorks Institute](#)
- [Content Marketing Institute](#)
- [Public Health Communications Collaborative](#)
- [The Goodman Center](#)
- [University of Florida Center for Public Interest Communications](#)

Books and guides:

- [Talking health: A new way to talk about public health \(de Beaumont, 2022\)](#)
- [A framework for equity-centered health communications \(Communicate Health, 2023\)](#)
- [Content creator resources \(Content Marketing Institute, evergreen\)](#)

Webinars and training sessions:

- [The Power of Framing: Bridging Political Divides to Strengthen Public Health \(PH Comms Collaborative, 2022\)](#)
- [Communications for public health advocacy \(American Public Health Association, 2023\)](#)
- [Capitalizing on your campaigns with tactical content \(SiteImprove, 2023\)](#)

Questions and help

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Links embedded in this handout (in order of appearance):

- IAP2 spectrum of public participation: <https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>
- Bite, snack, meal: Are you making your web content digestible? <https://www.mightycitizen.com/insights/articles/bite-snack-meal-are-you-making-your-web-content-digestible>
- Opinion: I stopped reading the news. Is the problem me – or the product? <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/07/08/how-to-fix-news-media/>
- The inverted pyramid structure: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/journalism_and_journalistic_writing/the_inverted_pyramid.html
- Learning Freytag's Pyramid: <https://www.clearvoice.com/blog/what-is-freytags-pyramid-dramatic-structure>
- Putting systems in your stories: <https://radcommsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Putting-Systems-in-Your-Stories.pdf>
- The Feynman Technique: <https://fs.blog/feynman-technique/>
- PHRASES: <https://www.phrases.org/>
- FrameWorks Institute: <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/>
- Content Marketing Institute: <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/>
- Public Health Communications Collaborative: <https://publichealthcollaborative.org/>
- The Goodman Center: <https://www.thegoodmancenter.com/>
- University of Florida Center for Public Interest Communications: <https://realgoodcenter.jou.ufl.edu/>
- Talking health: A new way to talk about public health: <https://debeaumont.org/books/talking-health-a-new-way-to-communicate-about-public-health/>
- A framework for equity-centered health communications: <https://communicatehealth.com/wp-content/uploads/ch-echc-framework.pdf>
- Content creator resources: <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/creating-content/>
- The Power of Framing: Bridging Political Divides to Strengthen Public Health: <https://vimeo.com/761860657>
- Communications for public health advocacy: <https://youtu.be/YOurchLBmJQ>
- Capitalizing on your campaigns with tactical content: <https://videos.siteimprove.com/en/watch/jDD3XRBFZ4D5uUAYB5u85K?>

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To obtain this information in a different format, contact: 651-201-3880