



The Society for Public Health Education

7 Planning Steps to Communicating Your Message

Whichever media outlet you choose, you need to be clear on the purpose of your message. Health education and promotion strategies can be challenging to communicate to others. To successfully communicate your message, follow these seven steps:

Step 1: Identify your key audiences. You may have different key messages for specific populations and a general message for a broader population.

Step 2: Choose a key message. Determine one or two overall goals for your message. Use the following questions to guide the development of your overall strategy.

- **What is the problem you are highlighting?** Example: The poor health and wellness in the community due to tobacco use
- **Is there a solution? If so, what is it?** Example: Hiring health education specialists in schools, colleges/universities, health departments, community organizations, health facilities, worksites, and insurance companies to implement evidence-based tobacco cessation programs
- **What do you need to do or say to get the attention of those who can make the solution happen?** — Do you want to use the media to get your message out by holding a news conference or briefing? Or do you want to use a news release and/or advertising to get the attention of the public?

Once you have defined your overall goal, then you can design the message that you want to relay to your audience(s). You want your message to be simple and clear. Make sure you communicate:

- The problem you are addressing
- Why your intended audience should be concerned with this problem
- What should be done about the problem

Try to create a compelling message — one that people can relate to — share an individual's story, a person affected by the problem. By humanizing the message, your issues will have a greater impact on the public than if you just use statistics.

Possible key messages topics include:

- Increasing awareness of the various roles health education specialists can play in improving consumer health and wellness
- Providing support and resources for health education specialists in all facets
- Encouraging multi-sector collaboration, including government agencies, community-based organizations, schools, and businesses, whose services and decisions affect health education

specialists' provisions on consumer health and wellness

Step 3: Get the facts

Research the facts that support your key message(s). You can communicate your local messages with facts and statistics from your state and/or local community. For example, you may wish to include information about the incidence of major chronic diseases in your state, city, or county. You may be able to provide examples of local ordinances or policies that have already been adopted in your community. Many health education facts can be found throughout this toolkit. You can also find resources on the [SOPHE web site](#).

Step 4: Decide which media outlets you want to utilize

The first step in working with the media is to research and identify the news outlets you would like to cover your NHEW initiative(s). You can identify any reporters who have covered issues related to your initiatives in the past. To make the research easier, set up Google Alerts online (www.google.com/alerts) so that you automatically receive updates on relevant news stories in your area. Scan your local newspaper daily for health and community stories. Remember to update your media list regularly so that you can use it for outreach efforts during the year.

You can purchase media contact information from database services such as Cision (www.cision.com) or BurrellesLuce (http://www.burrellesluce.com/Media_Outreach).

Once you've identified these outlets and contacts, build an electronic media list using a program such as Microsoft Excel. Electronic lists are easy to update, and users can merge contacts for effortless delivery of materials via e-mail or mail.

Include local and regional radio, television, print outlets and key health journalists. Also identify relevant blogs and make contact with the blogger (to start your search, check out <http://blogsearch.google.com>). Join Twitter and follow groups with related messages to network and increase visibility.

Step 5: Write a news release

(See page 21 for information on writing a news release as well as a template for NHEW)

- Include a background page about NHEW, health education, and health education specialists in your city or region. The background page can include key facts, statistics, and information resources
- Identify a member of your organization as a local expert, spokesperson to answer questions
- Identify stories of individuals in the community who benefit from employing or working with health education specialists to pitch to journalists and bloggers for coverage

Step 6: Disseminate your information to media outlets & priority media targets

To distribute electronically, copy and paste your news release (see page 21 for tips on preparing a news release) into the body of the email. Many reporters will not open unsolicited attachments. Make sure they can clearly see the headline and first paragraph without enlarging or scrolling down in the email, as this will increase the likelihood your release will be seen. Personalize each email so the reporter knows

it's not a mass message. For example, mention a story recently written by the reporter that caught your eye, or if you have had previous interactions with him/her, mention when and where to jog his/her memory.

If you would like to send your news release to a large number of recipients, there are many online resources available to help you increase the awareness and visibility of your event. It is a best practice to include a brief cover letter with your news release. Some of these services may charge a fee, so it's important to research each option before submitting your event materials. Some may offer discounts to nonprofit organizations. Top distribution sites include:

- ◆ Business Wire (www.businesswire.com)
- ◆ PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com)
- ◆ PR Log (www.prlog.org)
- ◆ 24/7 Press Release (www.24-7pressrelease.com)
- ◆ PRWeb (<http://www.prweb.com/>)

Some free press release distribution sites include:

- Free Press Release (www.free-press-release.com)
- PR (www.pr.com)
- 1888 Press Release (www.1888pressrelease.com)

Step 7: Outcome Evaluation

Outcome evaluation answers the question, "how effective was the campaign at producing its intended results among the audience?" Outcome evaluation items might include: "Are more members of my community reporting that they are knowledgeable of the benefits of Health Education Specialists in the community?" If evaluation seems overwhelming or too complicated, do not forget that there are many resources available. Consider enlisting the help of a local evaluator, a graduate student in the field, volunteer interns, or the services of professionally trained public health evaluators.

In addition, there are a variety of Internet resources that you can access:

- National Network of Libraries of Medicine: Outreach Evaluation Resource Center - <http://nnlm.gov/evaluation/>
- CDC Evaluation Working Group - <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/>
- Community Tool Box (from the University of Kansas) - <http://ctb.ku.edu/>
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Toolkit - <https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2010/w-k-kellogg-foundation-evaluation-handbook>