

Introduction to Strategic Communication Planning

Welcome

Welcome to *Introduction to Strategic Communication Planning*. This is the first of three modules on Communication Planning for Program Success and Sustainability.

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.

Make the Most of the Three Modules

There's no one right way to get the most out of these modules, but here are a few suggestions.

First, take this at a pace that's comfortable for you, but commit to finishing all three modules—as well as your communication plan—by a certain date. That commitment will help you stay focused.

Second, invite your staff and partners to work through the modules and do your communication planning with them. Engaging others in this work generates support for

the planning process—and the outcomes. Because these modules are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, you and your team can work through the modules and develop your communication plan at your convenience. You can come back to review sections of the modules at any time.

Finally, if you have access to technical assistance on communication, now is a great time to tap into it. Your communication TA provider can help you and your team stay on track and stay strategic.

This Module

Module 1 begins by introducing you to fundamental communication and social marketing concepts. We help you shift from thinking like the expert that you are to thinking like a social marketer. We'll introduce you to a strategic approach to communication planning and guide you through the first two steps of the planning process.

Along the way, we'll ask you questions, we'll have you read a few short descriptions of how different communities have approached communication planning, and we'll ask you to share your opinions. For Steps 1 and 2 of the planning process, we'll provide worksheets that you can use with your staff and partners.

Let's get started.

How Can Communication Help You

First, let's get a sense of how communication might help you. Consider which of the following apply to you. Do you want:

- More children, youth, and families to use your programs and services?
- Community leaders to embrace your approach to promotion and prevention?
- The business and/or faith community to support your efforts?
- Schools and school districts to make promotion and prevention a priority?
- Healthcare providers to promote prevention services to their patients?
- Local media coverage to share your success with the wider community?
- The right partners at the table to ensure sustainability?

Even if you indicated that just one of these options applies to you, you're ready to communicate.

The following two stories describe how two different programs achieved meaningful outcomes when they decided to communicate strategically about their work. If you selected one or more of the options in the previous activity, the stories will describe how communication planning can help your program achieve meaningful outcomes, too.

Story 1: When our district superintendent asked us to develop better strategies for engaging parents, we decided to host a School-Parent Summit, an all-day event for parents on how to support their children to get the most out of school. But because we only promoted the event by sending a flyer home with students, fewer than 20 parents showed up.

When we hosted the summit again the following year, we did a better job of promoting it—a press release to local media, posters in supermarkets and laundromats, an interview on a local radio talk show, and announcements in the bulletins and newsletters of local houses of worship. When over 200 parents attended the second summit, the superintendent asked us to make it an annual event.

Since the summit is a great forum for school staff to hear from parents and share resources, getting the word out about the event is critical. Having just hosted our fifth summit—attended by over 900 parents—we now have parent advisors help us identify strategies for promoting the summit. We're very active on social media, using photos and video clips from prior summits. Learning how to spread the word about the summit has made the event so much more effective!

Story 2: When our community coalition on children's mental health received a new grant four years ago, we expanded our work to serve young parents with preschool-age children. At a coalition meeting two years into the grant, one of our partner organizations asked, "How are we going to keep this going when the grant funding is over in three years?"

You could have heard a pin drop in the room. We really hadn't given much thought to sustaining our services over time. I guess we all assumed that we'd apply for new grant funds, but that isn't much of a strategy. So the coalition created a strategic plan for sustaining our work. Part of the plan involved engaging new partners.

Integrating new partners has required that we reframe our work to meet not only the needs of existing partners but also those of new partners. We now have three faith-based organizations in the coalition and we're about to start providing family counseling services to young parents who work in a couple of our local businesses. We're still on the lookout for grant funding, but our top priority now is building local commitment to improving the health and well-being of our community's families.

How Ready Are You to Communicate?

You've probably realized that your program could benefit from communication, but are you ready? Consider yourself, your staff, and your partners—anyone who would be involved in this work. Think about your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

1. We are ready to learn how to market our work more effectively.
Do you strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral, agree, or strongly agree with this statement?
2. We are ready to take the time to make communication a priority for our program.
Do you strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral, agree, or strongly agree with this statement?
3. We are ready to think strategically about communication in order to make the most of our time and resources.
Do you strongly disagree, disagree, feel neutral, agree, or strongly agree with this statement?

If you tended to disagree with most of the statements, you may need to take some preparatory steps before developing a communication plan. Our recommendation is that you and your team complete this module to learn more about the fundamentals of communication and social marketing. Doing so may enhance your team's readiness to undertake this work. At the very least, the concepts in this module will help you adopt a "marketing mindset" that can positively influence your work. Consider talking with your staff and partners about what it will take to increase the team's commitment to doing this.

If you tended to agree with most of the statements, you're ready to get to work. You understand that effective communication and social marketing can contribute to the success and sustainability of your program.

Communication through a Social Marketing Lens

Why communicate about your program? Well, you can implement the best programs imaginable for children, families, schools, and communities, but if no one knows about them, they'll go unused. And if they're not used, no positive changes will result. And if there are no positive changes, there's certainly not much chance of sustaining your work.

Today you may be looking at ways to get young children screened for behavioral health issues before they start kindergarten. You may want to enroll middle school students in your after-school program. You may want to recruit volunteer mentors for your mentoring program. *Tomorrow* you'll need to find a way to sustain these programs.

You'll need to reach out to partners such as community leaders, businesses, faith groups, schools, and nonprofit organizations.

Success and sustainability are like the two rails on a railroad track. Just as the train can't run without both rails, getting to where you want to go requires communicating with both success and sustainability in mind.

Terms Defined

For each of the following definitions, consider whether the definition describes health communication, commercial marketing, or social marketing.

1. The use of commercial marketing principles and techniques to influence an intended audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole.
Is this health communication, commercial marketing, or social marketing?
2. The action or business of promoting and selling products or services to consumers for a profit, including market research and advertising.
Is this health communication, commercial marketing, or social marketing?
3. The study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health.
Is this health communication, commercial marketing, or social marketing?

The correct answers are as follows:

1. The use of commercial marketing principles and techniques to influence an intended audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole is the definition of social marketing.
2. The action or business of promoting and selling products or services to consumers for a profit, including market research and advertising is the definition of commercial marketing.
3. The study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health is the definition of health communication.

Health Communication and Social Marketing

Health communication is the study and use of communication strategies to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance health. This definition comes from the National Cancer Institute and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

You may not realize it, but you engage in health communication regularly. When you talk with parents about counseling services for their child, that's health communication.

When you meet with teachers to discuss prevention curricula, that's health communication. When you share updates with community partners and stakeholders, that's health communication.

Health communication can raise awareness of a problem and solutions. It can influence beliefs and attitudes. It can promote healthy behaviors and refute myths and misconceptions.

Social marketing is the use of commercial marketing principles and techniques to influence an intended audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole. This definition comes from Kotler, Roberto, and Lee, *Social Marketing*, 2002.

Social marketing is a health communication strategy. There are a few important points to note about this definition. First, social marketing taps into the practices of commercial marketing, which we'll discuss in a moment. Next, social marketing focuses on your "intended" audience. The intended audience is the specific group of people you want to reach, not the general public. Finally, note that social marketing persuades people to voluntarily take an action.

Voluntary Behavior Change

Think of it this way: If we persuade people to stop texting while driving because it's healthy and safe, *that's* social marketing. A social marketing campaign to reduce texting while driving might aim to convince drivers to change their behavior because it's dangerous and they don't want to hurt themselves or others.

A policy/law enforcement approach to reduce texting while driving would aim to prompt drivers to stop texting while driving because they don't want to get a ticket.

Both approaches can help reduce texting while driving, and both approaches are often used together to reinforce healthy choices. But our work is grounded in the social marketing goal of *voluntary* behavior change.

Let's look at how social marketing builds on the principles and practices of commercial marketing.

Commercial Marketing

Unless you live completely off the grid, you're on the receiving end of considerable commercial marketing every day. TV commercials, print ads, Internet banners, Facebook ads, product placements in television shows and movies, billboards, radio spots, store displays: companies use all these means and more to entice you to purchase their products and services.

And that's the key—commercial marketing measures success in terms of sales of a product or service. If commercial marketing does its job well, the consumer makes a decision to pull out his or her wallet. In other words, success in commercial marketing is Show Me the Money.

Social Marketing

Social marketing builds on the principles and practices of commercial marketing, but it measures success very differently. Remember the definition of social marketing that we looked at? It says that social marketing aims to convince audiences to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon a behavior for the benefit of themselves, their community, or society as a whole. For us, success is measured in positive behavior change (for example, persuading teens not to text when they're driving).

Often, it may seem that raising awareness of an issue is sufficient. Although raising awareness can be an important first step in reaching out to an audience, ultimately, you want people to take action and do something that they haven't done before. This is true whether you want to convince community partners to embrace new recommendations, encourage a clergy member to come to a meeting, persuade a parent to sign up for a class, or motivate students to tell an adult when they witness bullying. In each case, someone is taking an action that he or she hasn't taken before. Every time someone takes such an action, the needle moves just a bit more in the right direction in your community.

In these modules on communication planning, you'll learn to use communication not only to raise awareness but, more importantly, to persuade your audiences to do something that they haven't done before.

What Do They Have in Common?

To recap, commercial marketing defines success as an exchange of money, while social marketing defines success as behavior change.

But commercial marketing and social marketing are alike in two very important ways. They are both audience-focused and research-based.

#1: Audience-Focused

Your program needs to reach all kinds of people—your intended audiences—to succeed. These audiences are very different from one another. Each has unique needs, beliefs, and values. They have different challenges that keep them awake at night. The priorities of a single working mom who's holding down two service industry jobs while raising three children under the age of ten are a far cry from the priorities of a teacher who feels overworked or a state legislator who is up for reelection. And those are only three of many potential audiences you may need to reach.

So if your audiences care about substantively different things, why should they all respond the same way to the same messages? They won't. You need to customize your messages so that they resonate with all of your intended audiences.

#2: Research-based

To reach all your intended audiences, you need to learn more about each group, which is another commonality between commercial and social marketing.

Marketers of all stripes rely on research to tell them what an intended audience feels, knows, believes, and values as well as how it acts. You can conduct research to identify a target audience's behaviors based on any number of demographic or psychological variables. You can then use that information to develop your messages and how you deliver those messages. After that, you can evaluate your efforts to see what's working and what needs to be tweaked.

In other words, no guessing allowed. In Module 2, we'll discuss easy ways to learn about your audiences. It's important to take the time to learn about your audiences, and here's why...

Preparing to Communicate

You may *think* you know a great deal about your audiences, but your assumptions about them are based on your own perceptions and biases. You need to take a step back, learn about your audiences, pay close attention to what you learn, and base your communication efforts on this knowledge.

It sounds remarkably simple, but there's one huge stumbling block—and that's your expertise.

You're an expert in your field. You KNOW that your programs and services are invaluable—they can truly change lives for the better. So why isn't it enough to just let the world know your programs exist? Why not just tell the world that the program is up and running and watch as people start streaming through the doors?

Experts sometimes make the mistake of assuming that they can simply transfer what they know by sharing the facts with their audiences. The audiences will then change their behavior, and everyone will live happily ever after. It's a lovely fairy tale, but it's not grounded in reality.

The "Expert Approach to Communication"

One reason is that most of us don't take well to having "experts" tell us what to do. We frequently tune them out—even if the message is one we might want to hear.

For example, your program may offer great parenting classes that could help struggling parents who haven't experienced a calm meal with their children in months. You'd love

to have those parents in your class. But your “expert” message—which may be filled with jargon related to social-emotional learning and resiliency—can easily be misinterpreted by the very parents you want to reach. Your message may have the unintended consequence of causing parents to ask, “Are you telling me I’m a bad parent?”

Experts often build much-needed programs and find themselves baffled when they can’t convince their intended audiences to participate in the program or follow their advice.

In fact, the messages experts create may end up **BLAMING** your intended audiences. Unintentionally, you may be conveying, *What’s the matter with those parents? What’s the matter with that principal? Those business owners?* When that happens, there’s an even greater gap between your program and your audiences.

So there has to be a better way!

A Better Approach: The Marketing Mindset

It’s important to move from an “expert mindset” to a “marketing mindset.” Doing so requires remembering one important concept: When it comes to successfully communicating with your intended audiences, what’s important is not what you want them to hear; it’s what they’re able to hear.

Because you’re not the end-users of your programs, you don’t necessarily understand your audiences’ needs and wants. It’s time to become “experts” on the people you want to bring in the door. It’s time to get to know your intended audiences.

You need to ask questions that put the focus on the audience, not you. This includes questions such as:

- What are your audiences’ beliefs, values, and goals? How does your program reflect these?
- What’s not working with your offering?
- What’s off-base with your message and/or the way it’s delivered?
- What do you need to offer to offset barriers to participation?

Understanding the marketing mindset can help you avoid the trap of “expert” communication messages that miss the mark.

Here is a story about the importance of understanding your audiences’ needs and wants.

The demographics of our mid-sized city have really changed in the last 25 years, especially as we've welcomed new immigrants from Central and South America, Asia, and Africa. Unfortunately, we've found that although many of the newest members of our community need health and social services, they're not accessing them.

Part of our program's mission is to reduce these disparities. At first, we thought if we just told our newest residents about the free and low-cost services we offer, they'd come streaming through our doors. But when that didn't happen, we asked a few leaders from the immigrant communities for help.

We've learned a lot in this process. For one thing, we now understand that it's not enough to translate our program materials into other languages; we need to work on understanding and respecting the cultures of our newest citizens in order to convey how our program might be of value to them. For another, we've learned we need to gain the trust of all the populations we serve. One strategy we're using is engaging "bridge builders"—trusted members from each community willing to share our message. Rethinking how we talk about our program to our newest neighbors is a real priority for us.

Activity: Tell Teachers about a New Curriculum

In this activity, you will play the role of a new prevention program coordinator in a school district. You want to convince the district's second-grade teachers to try out a curriculum that focuses on positive behaviors. You have 15 minutes to talk with the teachers at the end of a full day of in-service training on another topic. There's a photograph of three second-grade teachers.

Which of the following 3 options would be the best way to tell the teachers about this curriculum?

Option 1: Our district wants to try out a new curriculum for second-grade classrooms. It will take two hours a week for the coming semester. You'll need a day of training to learn to do it right, and you'll need to participate in evaluation surveys every few weeks.

Option 2: I want to share with you this proven program that can help make your classroom calmer and make it easier for you to teach. Participating in training on the curriculum will help meet your professional development requirements. I'd be happy to talk with you about the program after this meeting, or we can meet at your convenience.

Option 3: We're looking for volunteers to try out a new curriculum. It looks promising if you implement it with fidelity, and it might help make your classroom calmer. Who wants to give it a try?

If you chose Option 1, it is not an effective message. It emphasizes the burdens associated with trying out the new curriculum and none of the benefits.

Option 2 is an effective message. It acknowledges the challenges teachers face and describes two benefits of the program: calmer classrooms and professional development credits for participating in training.

Option 3 is not an effective message. It provides little information and no real incentive for teachers to try out the new curriculum.

The Social Exchange Theory

One reason why Option 2 in the previous exercise works best can be explained by the Social Exchange Theory. Essentially, the Social Exchange Theory boils down to “What’s in it for me?” We ask ourselves this question almost every time we make a choice. According to the theory, we weigh the benefits of a choice against the costs of the choice. If the benefits outweigh the costs (also known as the barriers to a choice), we’ll say yes. If the costs outweigh the benefits, we’ll say no.

Benefits or barriers can include tangible assets like money—less money spent is a benefit, more is a cost. Time can be either a benefit or a barrier. When we give someone back precious time in their day, it’s generally considered a benefit. When we ask people to give their time, it’s considered a cost. Benefits and barriers also can include less tangible things. When we choose to volunteer time—a cost to us—it makes us *feel* good, and that’s a benefit that might be more important than time. If we ask a middle school student to tell an adult when they observe bullying, we’re asking the student to take an action that might bring with it significant costs.

Let’s apply the Social Exchange Theory to the activity we just completed. You’re asking second-grade teachers to agree to teach a new curriculum. You’re asking them to devote two hours a week to the curriculum for a whole semester, participate in a full day of training to learn the curriculum, and complete evaluation activities.

Every one of these “asks” is a cost, or potential barrier, to getting teachers to say yes. If the only thing you communicate when you talk with the teachers is the costs, you’ll have little chance of getting them to step up and say “yes.” According to your message, saying yes would cost them time in various ways: classroom time they could spend on other activities, time they would have to spend attending training, and time they would have to give up to participate in the evaluation.

But what if you shared, right up front, that this investment of teacher time would actually result in calmer, happier classrooms with fewer disciplinary referrals? Now you might be solving an important problem for the teachers. What if you told them that attending

training on this curriculum would help them meet their professional development requirements? Benefits like these really help offset the costs to saying yes.

The Social Exchange Theory reminds you to recognize and respect your audiences' priorities and concerns. When you put their needs front and center, you can move from an expert mindset to a marketing mindset, and increase the chances that your intended audience—in this case, second grade teachers—will say yes.

So Far, So Good

Let's sum up where we are:

Your audiences—their needs, values, beliefs, and priorities—should be front and center in all your communication efforts.

Because your audiences are very different from one another, there is no such thing as “one size fits all.” You need to understand each of your audiences and work to meet their needs.

The Social Exchange Theory reminds us that before people make a choice, they commonly ask themselves, “What's in it for me?” They weigh the benefits against the costs or barriers before they make a decision.

Finally, moving from an “expert mindset” to a “marketing mindset” will help you get where you need to go.

The Road to Success

Now that you're moving toward a marketing mindset, let's apply the mindset to strategic communication planning.

Why plan for communication? A plan helps you understand where you are and where you want to go. A plan is a road map. There may be detours along the way, but the map will keep you on track toward your destination.

Because your work life is filled with many responsibilities, it may seem that developing a communication plan will take too much time. However, the time you spend up front in communication planning will yield rich results down the road.

The Best Tool in the Toolbox: The 8-Step Model

Now we'd like to introduce you to this 8-step model for communication planning, which is based on a planning model developed by the National Cancer Institute. This tool will help you stay strategic. It will keep you research-based and audience-focused.

The process embedded in this tool can help you craft a full-blown communication plan or simply improve the way you write your program's newsletter.

Here are the eight steps:

1. Step 1. Assess your current situation: where are you now?
2. Step 2. Set communication goals and objectives, making sure your goals are measurable and realistic.
3. Step 3. Identify your intended audiences: whom do you need to reach? Be specific and segmented.
4. Step 4. Develop and pretest messages: what does each audience need to hear? Will they respond to the message?
5. Step 5. Select channels, activities, materials, and partnerships: how will your messages be delivered? Who will deliver them?
6. Step 6. Develop an action plan: who is responsible for doing what when?
7. Step 7. Develop and pretest materials: do your intended audiences respond to the materials you've developed?
8. Step 8. Implement, evaluate, and modify your plan: it's a "living" plan – it should be revised as needed.

The first five steps help you develop a strategy. The final three steps help you put that plan in place.

Step 1: Assess your Current Situation

The first step is to take a snapshot of where your program is *right now*. Why? Well, if you were planning a road trip, it would be impossible to get to "point B" if you don't first know where "point A" is.

Kick-Start Your Thinking

Begin Step 1 by having a conversation with your team. Ask questions to help the group reflect on where you've been and where you are now. Consider the following questions to kick-start the group's thinking:

- Do people in your community and schools know about your program?
- Do other community partners need to be at the table or do you need to be at *their* table?
- Are you on track with program implementation?
- Does your program serve the number of people you set out to serve?

- Does your program serve culturally diverse populations?
- Is your program seeing the results you hoped for?
- Have the media covered your program in a positive light?
- Do you have champions in your community and schools who help spread the word about your program?

If you're a relatively new organization or are implementing new programs and services, your questions might be different from the ones you would ask if your focus were on sustaining or expanding an existing program.

Consider Conducting a SWOT analysis

Next, it's a good idea to conduct a SWOT analysis with your team. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Strengths are *internal* attributes of your program that can *help you* achieve your objectives. An example of a strength is having a strong team, especially in early childhood.

Weaknesses are *internal* attributes of your program that can *hinder* achieving your objectives. An example of a weakness is not having shared your successes with your stakeholders.

Opportunities are *external* conditions that can *help you* achieve your objectives. An example of an opportunity is leveraging parent champions to support program sustainability.

Threats are *external* conditions that can *hinder* your program's performance. An example of a threat is budget cuts that result in less money for sustaining services.

Consider conducting a SWOT analysis during a meeting with your staff and community partners. To make the most of your time, you can divide participants into four groups, with each group filling in one of the quadrants. The small groups then can report back to the large group, with members of the large group recommending additional items.

Step 1 Worksheet

Now it's time for you and your team to work on Step 1. It's important to collaborate with your staff and community partners on this and every other step in the 8-Step Model for Communication Planning. Remember, the goal for Step 1 is to create a snapshot of where your program is *right now* so that you can plan effectively.

To access the Step 1 worksheet, go to:

<http://airhsdlearning.airws.org/CommunicationModule1WorksheetsforStep1.docx>.

The first page of the worksheet includes guidance on the step, as well as examples of questions you can use with your team. The second page features a template for a SWOT analysis.

Step 2: Set Communication Goals and Objectives

Now that you have a sense of where you are currently, you're ready to begin creating communication goals and objectives to get you where you want to go.

There are many ways to define "goals" and "objectives," so let's clarify these terms.

Key Questions for Communication Goals

When it comes to your program's communication goals, it can help to ask the question: What do you want people to do that they are not already doing? What action do you want them to take? Or, as with social marketing, what behavior do you want to see change?

While your first step may be to raise awareness and educate your intended audiences, if you want to see true change, you need to include the changes you want to see in your communication goals.

Take the time with your team to figure out what your most important communication goals are. For example, do you want:

- Bystanders to bullying to tell an adult?
- Local places of worship to become long-term hosts for an after-school program?
- All children screened for behavioral wellness before entering kindergarten?
- The local health clinic to integrate mental health services into its work?
- Your district's high schools to adopt a new discipline referral process?
- Parents to understand the importance of developmental screening for children?

All these are examples of communication goals. Each of these goals can be attained with a series of objectives, or steps.

Communication Objectives

Let's take an example from the sample goals we just looked at. Let's say that your goal is to persuade parents of young children to have their child screened for behavioral wellness before kindergarten.

There are many steps your program would need to take to achieve this goal. Potential communication objectives for this goal include the following:

1. Educate parents about behavioral wellness and reduce fears related to screening. As a first step, you may need to inform parents that this screening is important to their child's success in school. Some parents will not feel comfortable with the notion of screening for behavioral wellness, even if it's free. Thinking back to the Social Exchange Theory, you will need to convey the benefits of screening while addressing parents' possible objections to it.
2. Persuade schools and other venues to host screening events..
3. Promote scheduled screening events to parents. This might require engaging pediatricians, day care centers, the media, and others to spread the word about the screening events.

All of these communication objectives support your overarching goal of persuading parents of young children to have their child screened.

One important distinction between goals and objectives is that goals are accomplished over the long-term, while objectives are accomplished in the short-term.

Prioritize Your Efforts

Creating communication goals and objectives can feel overwhelming. After you get started, you may find that you come up with a dozen communication goals and ten times as many objectives, but this is not recommended!

It's important to prioritize your efforts, staying strategic—and sane—in the process.

Ask yourself if there are items that need to happen *first*, or in the coming year. These items should take priority.

Then, if you have a logic model, implementation plan, or sustainability plan, check to make sure your communication goals and objectives support these plans. If they do, great. If not, revise your communication goals and objectives to align with these plans.

Finally, look for the “low-hanging fruit”—the communication goals and objectives that might be accomplished fairly easily. Early success is a great thing.

Key Tool for Step 2: SMART Goals/Objectives

After you know what you want to accomplish, refine your communication goals and objectives by making them SMART. The SMART acronym is a common method for developing effective goals and objectives.

The S in SMART stands for simple. Simple doesn't mean that the goal or objective is simple to achieve, but that it should be simply stated so that anyone can understand it.

The M in SMART stands for measurable. Measurable means that you have a way to know if you're hitting the mark.

The A in SMART stands for attainable. Attainable means that your goals and objectives need to be realistic.

The R in SMART stands for relevant. Relevant means that you're making certain your audiences will have a reason to care. And it's up to you to help your audiences make that connection.

The T in SMART stands for time-bound. Time-bound means that you have assigned a deadline to your goals and objectives. The calendar becomes a critical tool, preventing programs from putting off communication work indefinitely.

When you put all these together, you stay SMART. You're focused, strategic, and a much more effective communicator.

Staying SMART

One way to state this SMART communication goal would be to say: By September of next school year, persuade 65 percent of parents of entering kindergarteners to have their child screened for behavioral wellness. We've added a measurement (65 percent of parents) and made it time-bound (with a target date of September of next school year).

The following communication objectives that support the goal are now also SMART, with each featuring a timeframe and a way to measure achievement of the objective.

Communication objective 1: By May of next school year, provide information about behavioral screening to all parents of entering kindergarteners.

Communication objective 2: By June of next school year, persuade six facilities (including schools and health clinics) to host back-to-school behavioral screening events.

Communication objective 3: By September of next school year, promote screening events to parents through schools, pediatricians, health clinics, child care centers, and social media.

Developing SMART communication goals and objectives tells you *what* you want to do and *when* you're going to do it. The rest of your strategy, which will be addressed in Module 2, tells you *how* you're going to do it.

SMART Or Not?

Decide whether each of the following communication goals or objectives is SMART or not.

1. Persuade a local mental health agency to sustain your school-based mental health services. Is this SMART or not SMART?
2. By the start of the new school year, recruit 20 new adult volunteers to serve as mentors to middle school students who are at risk. Is this SMART or not SMART?
3. In March and April, conduct a survey of 100 local mothers of preschoolers regarding their needs and challenges. Is this SMART or not SMART?
4. Get the local media to cover your July 4th Family Day event to increase awareness of your program's services. Is this SMART or not SMART?

The first statement is not SMART, because while it is simply-stated, it is not time-bound and it is not clear how it will be measured.

The second statement is SMART, because it is simply stated and easily measurable. It is achievable, realistic, and time-bound.

The third statement is SMART, because it is simply stated, measurable, and time-bound. With a minimum of planning, it should be both achievable and realistic.

The fourth statement not SMART. Since you cannot control what the media covers, this objective may not be feasible. A SMART version of this objective might read: "By the second week of June, request that the local newspaper and TV station cover our July 4th Family Day event."

Step 2 Worksheet

It's time to develop SMART communication goals and objectives for your program. Your goals and objectives will form the basis for your communication strategy, so take the time you need with your staff and partners to come to consensus on your goals and objectives.

To access the Step 2 worksheet, go to:

<http://airhsdlearning.airws.org/CommunicationModule1WorksheetsforStep2.docx>.

The worksheet for this step explains the difference between communication goals and objectives and provides a reminder to prioritize your communication work as well as a description of the SMART acronym. There's also a straightforward template to capture your communication goals and objectives.

For most prevention programs, working on three to five communication goals at a time tends to be both realistic and achievable. Of course, if your team prefers, you may want to focus on just one overarching communication goal and related objectives. Again, if you have access to communication technical assistance, consider tapping into that resource for support with this work.

Module 1 Review

To review, this module covered fundamental principles of communication and social marketing. We distinguished between health communication and social marketing, a kind of health communication strategy. We looked at how social marketing builds on the principles of commercial marketing, including by focusing on intended audiences and research. And we acknowledged that the goal of social marketing is not to sell a product or service but to persuade an intended audience to adopt a behavior.

We talked about the importance of aiming higher than simply raising awareness and the fact that you want your intended audiences to do something they haven't done before.

We practiced moving from an expert mindset to a marketing mindset where the needs, beliefs, values, and priorities of your audiences are front and center. And we introduced the Social Exchange Theory, which can help you better understand—and respect—your intended audiences so that you can create messages that persuade them to take specific actions.

We then introduced the 8-Step Model for Communication Planning and explained how, with your team, you can complete Steps 1 and 2 of the model (Assessing Your Situation and Setting Communication Goals and Objectives).

Coming up in Module 2

We hope you've enjoyed this module, and we encourage you to continue to the next modules in this series: Developing Your Communication Strategy.

In Module 2, we will dive into Steps 3, 4, and 5 of the 8-Step Communication Planning Model. We'll help you identify the audience segments you need to reach. We'll explore how to create values-based messages that align with your audiences' values and priorities, and we'll investigate delivering your messages when, where, and how your audiences will be most receptive to hearing them. We'll provide worksheets for each step that you can complete with your team. At the end of Module 2, you will have a strategic communication plan mapped out. And in Module 3, we'll help you move from communication planning to action.