



Creating a Communication Plan

Description:

This tool provides guidelines for creating a communication plan.

How it can be used:

Effective communications have the power to change the way an organization functions and also how it is viewed by the community and outside partners. A well-planned and executed communications plan related to your accreditation process can make a vast difference in how your community and stakeholders engage with your work.

Communication refers to an exchange of information. When communicating, we share a message with a particular audience, listen to feedback, and respond appropriately. Well-coordinated communications will raise the profile of your accreditation process and generate positive outcomes such as building more trust in your work, increasing credibility, and improving relationships within the community and with outside partners.

A communications plan doesn't have to be lengthy or complicated, but it does need show how your communications activities help you reach your accreditation goals.

Although there are many ways to structure your communications plan, the key elements are:

Goals and Objectives

Every communications plan should begin with a clear statement of goals and objectives. These should be simple and measurable. Always demonstrate how they help your organization reach its strategic goals.

Goals are the overall changes you wish to cause: your desired outcomes. Your goal might be *“To share information and engage with the community and stakeholders about accreditation.”*

Objectives are the short-term, measurable steps you take to reach your goal.

Audiences

The next step in the planning process is to identify your target audiences. The more clearly you can define your audience, the easier it will be to make choices about your messages and communication approaches. When analyzing each group, consider:

- What do they already know about accreditation and your organization?
- What type of message would be most effective?
- What are some factors influencing the audience that receives your message (e.g., literacy levels or cultural differences)?

Target audiences may include community members, Chief and Council, Health Board/Committee, Federal government/Provincial government/ Regional Health Authority etc.



It is important to understand your different audiences and what motivates them. When targeting various audiences, you need to determine for each of them:

- The purpose for contacting them;
- The information and messages they need;
- The best approach for delivering your message;
- The expectation of what will happen when they receive the messages.

Messages

Identify the essential idea(s) you want to communicate. What does each audience already know about accreditation? What do they need to know or learn?

Think about two or three main points that you want each audience to know about your work on accreditation. These are your key messages. A few examples of key messages may be:

- *“Our organization is committed to continuous quality improvement”*
- *“Accreditation is helping us improve our programs and services”*
- *“We are proud to be delivering high quality programs based on standards of excellence”*
- *“Our health organization is accredited using the same standards of excellence as mainstream health organizations”*

Approaches - Channels and Tools

Channels are the ways that you communicate your key messages. Some examples are mail, email, posters, meetings, radio, newspapers, blog or social media such as Facebook. Examples of tools would be posters, brochures, etc. Choose the channel by considering how your audience will best access your message.

Before creating tools or producing any specific materials, it is important to define its purpose. Producing materials is expensive and time-consuming. As with other parts of your communications plan, the question should be: ***Why are we doing this?***

Implementation Plan

Your implementation plan is where you create an outline for how your communications plan will get done. It is often formatted as a table. Below is an example how to set up an implementation plan.

Objective	Action	Lead	Timeline	Resources	Indicators of Success	Anticipated Outcome	Notes

Evaluating the Communications Plan

How will you know if you are successful? By evaluating your communications plan, you can learn how your plan worked with various audiences, which activities had the most impact, and which parts of the plan didn't work. That provides valuable knowledge for the next time you communicate!