Strategic Communication Planning Guide

A Strategic Workbook for Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act Grantees
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Welcome!

Great communication begins with a strong strategic plan developed for your grant site by your staff, partners, and stakeholders. Creating a reliable, well-considered plan provides a strategic roadmap for your communication activities. It is also a critical component of your program’s long-term success and sustainability.

Why Communication Planning Is Critical to Your Success

Creating a communication plan presents you and your partners with an opportunity to contribute to your team’s ongoing success. Your Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) grant allows you to make a meaningful investment in your local community, state or campus. As you look toward developing your program, you will need to ask others to join you in that effort. A communication plan can help in that regard.

Your plan will allow you to uncover ways to deepen existing partnerships and develop new relationships that hold the potential to sustain—or expand—key functions of your program. Your plan will allow you to make the most of your limited time and resources. Having a plan in place also can alleviate the stress many grantees feel near the end of federal funding around continuing suicide prevention activities and leadership.

It is always a strategic move to revisit your communication plan when you seek to reach out to new and different audiences or when you have adapted your programmatic goals or objectives. It is a good idea to revisit your plan at least once a year. That way, your communication activities align with your programmatic goals and you can tell your story in a way that generates more awareness and support for your program moving forward.

It is never too early—or too late—to think strategically about communication. This process can be an important tool to help your program leave a lasting footprint in your community and to reach the goals you set for your essential work.

Even if your program has created communication plans in the past, or you have an office that has the lead responsibility for media outreach and contact, suicide is a unique topic that must be covered in particular ways. This workbook will guide you through the principles and steps of creating a safe and effective communication plan.
The 8-Step Communication Planning Model

The 8-Step Communication Planning Model\(^1\) provides a blueprint for planning, regardless of where you are in your grant cycle. It is not a “one size fits all” tool, but it allows users to create specific, actionable communication plans. It is based on the theory and practice of social marketing, which adapts commercial marketing techniques to influence people to take recommended action or make positive changes in their lives.

This model will help you:

- Start with a thorough assessment of your current situation (Step 1);
- Set measurable communication goals (Step 2);
- Define your intended—sometimes called “target”—audiences (Step 3);
- Develop and pretest your messages to those audiences (Step 4);
- Select the best ways to deliver those messages (Step 5);
- Create an action plan for delivering your messages and materials (Step 6);
- Develop and pretest materials you wish to create (Step 7); and
- Implement and evaluate the plan (Step 8).

Every communication plan is a “living” document, and its ultimate success depends on a willingness to evaluate how implementation is going and make mid-course changes as needed.

Using This Workbook

This 8-step process works for your program no matter where you are in your grant cycle, from start-up to sustainability planning. Use this workbook to develop a comprehensive communication plan—or you can apply the model to strategically approach a smaller communication effort, such as creating a brochure that informs your community about mental health services available to them.

In addition to this introductory section, this workbook provides guidance and worksheets for completing the first six steps of the 8-Step Model. These steps represent the strategic component of your plan. The workbook also provides an understanding of steps 7 and 8—the steps that allow you to implement your strategy. The workbook does not provide tailored worksheets for steps 7 and 8 because each grant program will design unique communication action plans and materials. This is why the workbook provides general information about how best to tailor these steps for your specific grant program.

The workbook is intended for use by a small group of your key staff or others centrally involved in your program. Please share the documents and exercises so that your resulting communication plan represents the group’s best thinking.

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\(^1\) This planning model is based on the National Cancer Institute’s *Making Health Communication Programs Work* (the Pink Book, 2001) with additional information drawn from Kotler, Roberto, and Lee’s *Social Marketing: Improving the Quality of Life* (2002).
The 8-Step Communication Planning Model

1. Assess current situation
2. Set communications goals & objectives
3. Identify intended audiences
4. Develop & pretest messages
5. Select channels, activities, materials, & partnerships
6. Develop action plan
7. Develop & pretest materials
8. Implement, evaluate, & modify plan
Step 1: Assess Your Current Situation

Purpose: To articulate your successes to date and determine any challenges that may exist.

The first step in developing your communication plan is to realistically assess your current situation. Why? Because you cannot determine where to go if you do not know where you are.

First, Ask the Right Questions

Start by asking the right questions—questions that help you and your partners identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing your program. The answers will provide you with a strong reality check and will include both the hard truths and the abstract components of your program.

The following list contains the types of questions you should collectively consider as you work through this first step of the 8-Step Communication Planning Model. Think about how you would answer each question as you continue reading.

- Are you serving the numbers of people you set out to serve?
- Are you effectively serving the diverse spectrum of young people in your community or campus, including high-risk groups?
- Are your partners, behind your program? Are they “champions” yet?
- Have the local news media covered your program? What kind of coverage have you received?
- Have you identified the key program functions you want to sustain?
- Are your partners committed to sustaining this program?
- How do money and resources flow in your community? How are other programs funded?
- Whom else do you need on board to sustain your program? Do you see your mission aligning with other efforts? How could you work together?

Then, Conduct a SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is an excellent tool for taking stock of where your program is right now. Think about your answers to the questions above. Then, as a group, complete the following chart with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats surrounding your program. Remember:

- Strengths are internal attributes of your program that can help achieve your objectives;
- Weaknesses are internal attributes of your program that can hinder your objectives;
- Opportunities are external conditions that can help achieve your objectives; and
- Threats are external conditions that could hinder your program’s performance.
Directions:
Consider your answers to the questions on the previous page and complete this SWOT analysis. Additional blank worksheets are on page 25.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Staff are highly dedicated to building suicide prevention awareness.</td>
<td>Example: There are no current resources to focus on community partnership development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Events are regularly held in the community to discuss and promote mental health and/or suicide prevention.</td>
<td>Example: Discussing suicide is stigmatized in the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 2: Set Communication Goals and Objectives

Purpose: To articulate your intended accomplishments in measurable ways.

Effective communication can be crucial to the success and sustainability of your efforts and to creating a lasting difference in your community. Setting appropriate and measurable strategic communication goals will help you get there.

Your communication goals should:

- Support your programmatic objectives;
- Help sustain your program; and
- Promote systems change.

Set communication goals that:

- Seek to engage, raise awareness, and—ultimately—change behavior;
- Persuade others to take action on your behalf;
- Are realistic; and
- Can be measured, so you will know when you have succeeded.

For example:

If your programmatic goals include:

1. Reducing barriers to mental health services and resources;
2. Implementing a campaign to promote the Lifeline among target groups; and
3. Develop a crisis response protocol for the community.

Then, your communication goals will focus on educating, engaging, and generating buy-in from the various audiences that can help you achieve those goals. For example:

1. Increase awareness about services that are available in the community;
2. Generate buy-in from key stakeholders to help implement the campaign; and
3. Bring together key partners and groups to take responsibility for crisis response.

Remember: Communication goals are not tactics.

Too often, a communication goal is misunderstood to mean “creating a brochure” or “sending a quarterly newsletter.” Although creating such materials may be important activities in your grant program, they are not goals. These are tactics that you may use to support your efforts to educate, engage, and generate buy-in from audiences. Step 5 (on page 15) delves deeper into these ideas (tactics). For now, take a step back, think strategically, and create your goals.
**Directions:**
With your core communication planning team, list up to five desired communication goals. Do not forget to take into account your findings from Step 1. Prioritize those goals by ranking them from 1 to 5 in the right column. Your number 1 goal should be your highest priority. Additional blank worksheets are on page 25.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Goals and Objectives</th>
<th>Prioritize 1–5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Example: Generate buy-in from key partners to co-host a suicide prevention awareness event.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 5</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 3: Identify Intended Audiences

Purpose: To identify all target audience segments for each communication goal; to prioritize those audiences; and to learn as much as possible about them.

Now that you have identified your communication goals and objectives, it is time to identify the specific audiences you need to reach for each goal or to determine what other partners need to be at the table.

Remember, the audiences you choose to reach with your communication plan early in your grant cycle may or may not be the audiences you need to reach later. For example, you might spend your first year focused entirely on engaging young adults in the community. Later, you may keep young adults as a key audience for sustainability while adding leadership or community partners.

Directions for Worksheet A:
List the audiences you need for each of your communication goals. Additional blank worksheets are on page 26.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List Intended Audiences for Each Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Example:</em> Generate buy-in from key partners to co-host a suicide prevention awareness event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Example:</em> Campus leadership, tribal elders or policymakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, Segment Your Audiences

Segmenting your audience means dividing a broader audience into smaller subgroups. Segmenting your audience is a critical—and often overlooked—step to creating communication messages and materials that resonate. For example, say you are working to reduce suicide risk among young adults, and one communication goal is to “generate interest in peer support programs among students.” One audience clearly would be students themselves, but not all of them will share the same interest level in the program. To create the most effective communication strategy, segment your broader audience into subgroups based on their needs, values, and/or mission. For example:

- Students who have participated in your peer program; or
- Students who are involved with other community activities and are seen as leaders by their peers.

Dividing your general audience into subgroups helps you craft messages and materials specifically tailored to them.

Then, Prioritize Your Audience Segments

You may now find that instead of communicating to all students, you are really looking at communicating to three key segments of the student body. This may seem as though your work has increased, but it has not. You can prioritize your audience segments and focus your efforts (strategically) on those groups at the top of the list.

To help in this process, ask yourself: Which segment is most likely to give the support you need to achieve your programmatic goals? Who should you reach first? Which segment’s mission most closely resembles yours?

Finally, What Do You Know About Them?

Once you have identified and prioritized your intended audience segments, learn as much as you can about their values, beliefs, and goals. What information sources do they trust? Are they aware of your program’s work, and do they support it? Which parts of your sustainability goals align with their concerns? What is the best way to reach them?

You can never know too much about your audiences, and your findings will assist you in creating messages and materials that are more likely to persuade them to take the desired action. You can learn more about your audiences through focus groups, surveys, listening sessions or other available data. Depending upon your specific setting, local agencies, departments on campus or knowledgeable people in the community may be able to help you to gain a better understanding about the students you hope to reach.
**Directions for Worksheet B:**
Write a priority goal in the top section of this worksheet. Use the left column to identify your list of the prioritized audience segments to reach for this goal. Fill in the right column by listing as much as you know about each segment. Use the questions listed as a point of departure for your thinking. Additional blank worksheets are on page 27.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended Audiences (listed in order of priority for this goal)</th>
<th>Consider: What does each audience want?</th>
<th>What do they value?</th>
<th>What information sources do they trust?</th>
<th>Where can you reach them?</th>
<th>What are the barriers to reaching them?</th>
<th>What current barriers do they face?</th>
<th>What else do you know about them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example: Campus leadership</strong></td>
<td>Examples: Campus leadership values the wellbeing of all students.</td>
<td>They trust academic and research findings.</td>
<td>They can be reached through student leadership groups.</td>
<td>Their lack of time may be a barrier to reaching them.</td>
<td>Campus leadership wants to encourage and ensure student retention.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example: Tribal elders</strong></td>
<td>Examples: Tribal elders value the wellbeing of all tribal members.</td>
<td>They trust and teach tribal rituals, customs, and beliefs.</td>
<td>They can be best reached through one-on-one meetings in their homes.</td>
<td>The fact that suicide is a cultural taboo could be a barrier to discussing suicide prevention openly with them.</td>
<td>Tribal elders want to encourage and ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of all tribal members, particularly the next generations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example: Policymakers</strong></td>
<td>Examples: Policymakers value the wellbeing of all individuals and families in the community.</td>
<td>Policymakers trust government, academic, and think-tank research findings.</td>
<td>They (or their staff) can be reached through one-on-one meetings.</td>
<td>Their lack of time may be a barrier to reaching them.</td>
<td>Policymakers need their constituencies’ support, which could be garnered by ensuring the health and safety of individuals and families in the community.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 4: Develop and Pretest Messages

Purpose: To develop effective messages that will resonate with your intended audiences and compel them to think, feel, or act in ways that support your communication goals.

Messages can be informative (convey new facts) or persuasive (alter attitudes, change behavior, or compel action). Sometimes, they are both. To persuade intended audience members to change behavior, you may first need to raise their awareness about an issue or program. If you can get them to agree with it, understand it, and believe it, then they may act on it.

Messages also can convey the key information you want audiences to know about your program. These messages will become the underlying themes highlighted and repeated in your materials and activities. They can be used as the basis of talking points, presentations, one-on-one discussions, or any other materials or tactics intended for your audiences. For example, an overarching message running through all your materials might be that supporting your program’s efforts is an investment in the community’s wellbeing. For each audience, effective messages should:

- Convey the relevance of sustaining your suicide prevention work to their beliefs and values
- Show the program’s importance by relating it to the core concerns in their lives;
- Put a “face” on the issue or program;
- Motivate them to think, feel, and act;
- Use language that is as free of technical, scientific, or bureaucratic jargon as possible;
- Highlight the benefits of your work, not just its features; and
- Make complete sense to them (e.g., speak in their language).

When developing messages, remember: “It’s not what you want to tell people, it's what they want to hear.” Tap into an existing thought, idea, or value your audience already has (based on what you have learned about them) and use this to frame your message instead of just telling them what they should think or do. Use the GLS Message Map found in the Message Map section of the toolkit as a guide in developing your messages.

Before creating any messages relating to suicide prevention, review the Introduction to Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention document found in the toolkit to ensure that you are following best practices.

Pretesting Messages

Even the most carefully crafted messages will not be effective if they do not resonate with the intended audience. Before moving forward to develop materials or activities, pretest your messages with your audiences to determine if the messages are persuasive. Ask a few members of an intended audience, or those who interact with them regularly, for input. Their feedback can help you gauge your campaign’s potential impact.

If you find that a particular message does not have the impact you envisioned, use this feedback to adjust your message before you create materials. This extra step could save you a great deal of time and money in the long run. Pretesting methods are discussed in greater detail in Step 7 of this workbook on page 18.
**Directions:**
Using your highest priority intended audience segment that you identified in Step 3, complete the questions on this worksheet. Refer to your findings from Step 3 as needed.

1. **What attitude** (feelings about an issue or program) or **behavior** (day-to-day actions) do you want to change in your intended audience? *Example: Leaders in the community (campus leadership, tribal elders, or policymakers) may feel **reluctant** to address the idea of suicide. Our program seeks to dispel beliefs that nothing can be done to prevent these tragedies so we must educate our leaders about the fact that suicide is preventable.*

2. **List some barriers and benefits** to your audience’s thoughts and feelings about or actions on your issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Example: Campus leadership may not want to recognize suicide as a problem because it may reflect negatively on their work as leaders.</em></td>
<td><em>Example: Campus leadership could contribute to investing in students’ wellbeing on campus, which could improve academic performance and student retention.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Example: Tribal elders may not want to discuss suicide as a problem because it is not part of the traditional culture.</em></td>
<td><em>Example: Tribal elders are committed to supporting the wellbeing of young people, which will improve the vitality and success of the next generations.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Example: Policymakers may not want to recognize suicide as a local problem because they underestimate how many constituents have been affected by suicide.</em></td>
<td><em>Example: Policymakers could enhance their support in the community by investing in accessible mental health services and resources.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Now, based on what your audience needs to hear to think, feel, or act differently, what is the most compelling sentence** you could use to motivate them? (Use the GLS Message Map found in the Message Map section of the toolkit as a guide for ideas.) This sentence is your **message**. (Please note that you may want to adapt this sentence before using it with your key audience.) *Example: Leaders should promote suicide prevention to invest in the community’s wellbeing and ensure the next generation’s vitality and success.*

4. **How will you pretest this message to determine its likelihood for success?** (Be sure to examine your message with the Introduction to Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention document found in the toolkit.) *Example: Conduct a focus group, survey or listening session with a few members of your intended audience.*
Step 5: Select Channels, Activities, and Materials

Purpose: To identify the most appropriate ways to deliver your messages to your audiences.

Determining the most effective way(s) to reach your audiences means going back to the work you did in Step 3. Refresh your memory:

- What sources of information do they trust?
- Who or what might compel them to take the desired action on your behalf?
- How do they prefer to receive your information?
- How and where do your intended audiences spend time? For example, to what clubs, faith-based groups, or organizations do they belong?

Answers to these kinds of questions will help you deliver your messages effectively, but there are other considerations as well. You need to determine how you can ensure that your communication will be:

- Appropriate for your goals and audiences;
- Delivered to your audiences in a timely manner;
- Aligned with your budget and resources; and
- Tailored to your audiences’ overall perceptions about mental health and suicide prevention services.

This step guides you to select the channels, activities, and materials you will use to deliver your message. Below are just a few examples that may be relevant to your communication plan and can help stimulate discussion with your partners.

Channels

Communication channels carry your messages to the intended audiences. Channels take many forms, and there are almost infinite possibilities. Some examples of channels include:

- People (you, your partners, trained gatekeepers or natural helpers)
- Radio stations
- Facebook, Twitter
- E-mail, listservs
- Websites
- Shopping malls
- Gas stations
- Post offices
- Grocery stories
- Local television stations
- Local newspapers
- Community centers
- Convenience stores or corner stores
- Parks
- Libraries or bookstores
- Restaurants
Activities, Events, and Materials

Activities and materials are the tactics and tools used to send messages through the channels. Some examples include:

Activities and Events
- Suicide Prevention Week activities
- Campus or community events
- Local business or government meetings
- Local festivals
- One-on-one meetings
- Sports games
- Award ceremonies
- Social media events
- Movie showings
- Concerts
- Pow Wows, GONAs or GOANs

Materials
- Fact sheets
- News releases
- PowerPoint presentations
- Public service announcements/videos
- Bulletins
- Flyers and brochures
- Listservs
- Posters
- Blogs
- Digital stories

Frequency and Mix

Think for a moment about the commercial marketing world. No one ever bought a can of Coca-Cola after seeing just one television commercial. You’ve probably seen hundreds of commercials for Coca-Cola over the years. You’ve also been exposed to product placement in movies and television, store displays, billboards, magazine ads, and much more—all designed to make you think about Coca-Cola when you’re thirsty.

The number of times you’re exposed to a product is called the “frequency.” The number of different ways you’re exposed to a product is called the “mix.” Typically, consumers are persuaded to buy a Coca-Cola after they’ve been exposed to a multitude of advertisements (frequency), in many forms (mix).

The same principles of frequency and mix apply to your program as well. You may need to make multiple presentations to key decision makers. You may need to tap into your champions to speak on your behalf. You may want to work with local media to cover your issue. You may want to provide any or all of your audiences with a variety of materials that highlight your programs and illustrate outcomes in an easy-to-understand way.

As you move to the worksheet on the next page, consider any and all channels, activities, events, and materials that can help you effectively deliver your messages to your audiences.
**Directions:**
Enter your highest priority communication goal at the top of this worksheet. Then identify your priority audience segment. Summarize your message in the appropriate space (it is fine if you cannot fit it all in there—just a key point or two will help your thinking). Complete the worksheet to identify the channels, activities, events, or materials that will most effectively deliver your message. Consider the frequency and mix of your delivery. Additional blank worksheets are on page 29.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Example: Generate buy-in from key stakeholders to co-host a suicide prevention awareness event.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intended Audience Segment:</td>
<td>Example: Campus leadership, tribal elders or policymakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message:</td>
<td>Example: Leaders should promote suicide prevention to invest in the community’s wellbeing to ensure the next generation’s vitality and success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delivery Methods</th>
<th>Description (Mix)</th>
<th>How often? (Frequency)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Channel</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong> Facebook group, grocery store bulletin board, newspaper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities and Events</strong></td>
<td><strong>Examples:</strong> Suicide Prevention Week activities, community events, local concerts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials</strong></td>
<td><strong>Examples:</strong> Fact sheets, PowerPoint presentations, PSAs, promotional items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 6: Develop Action Plan

Purpose: To determine where, when, and how each task will be done to successfully implement your communication plan.

This step ensures all the hard work your group has done sees the light of day. A great action plan makes the best use of everyone’s time. It is tantamount to good project management.

Shared participation is essential when putting your plan on its feet. Commitment from staff members, partners, volunteers, and champions shows that you have wide support for your goals—and their commitment might encourage potential new partners to get on board.

Your action plan can be as simple or as complex as your needs require, but at a minimum it should have the following essential information:

- A listing of major activities, tasks, and subtasks;
- The target date for completing each task; and
- The person responsible for ensuring each task is completed.

Below is a sample action plan based on a different communication goal than previously shown. This action plan includes a list of related tasks that should be used as an example. A blank worksheet is on page 30.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task/Subtask</th>
<th>Target Date</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Goal: Make presentation to stakeholders on supporting policies or resolutions to fund activities for Suicide Prevention Week.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft and send letter to the appropriate council, agency or department asking for time to present at next board meeting on suicide prevention.</td>
<td>March 5</td>
<td>Jamie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with evaluator to get latest data on success of suicide prevention services.</td>
<td>March 12</td>
<td>Todd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select three spokespeople for presentation (e.g., member of your target audience, community partner, and project director).</td>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a PowerPoint presentation for use by project director.</td>
<td>March 21</td>
<td>Todd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft four minute presentations to be made by the member of your target audience and community partner.</td>
<td>March 29</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train spokespeople on safe messaging; rehearse presentation.</td>
<td>April 2</td>
<td>Todd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare packet of leave-behind materials for board.</td>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send invitations to leadership to attend presentation.</td>
<td>April 11</td>
<td>Samiya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with the presentation site on logistics for the day.</td>
<td>April 12</td>
<td>Jackie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct rehearsal.</td>
<td>April 14</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure transportation to presentation site for spokespersons and selected invitees.</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>Samiya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategic Communication Planning for Your Campus GLS Program
Step 7: Develop and Pretest Materials

Purpose: To ensure that your materials will resonate with intended audiences before they are produced and used.

Communication and social marketing professionals have learned many lessons over the years about what makes a communication program or social marketing campaign effective. One of the most important lessons is the value of pretesting messages and materials. Having representative members of your intended audience review and comment on messages and materials before they are produced or used is essential to the success of your communication.

Pretesting helps you:

- Identify whether your messages and materials have any major flaws;
- Ensure your messages will resonate and encourage behavior change with your audience;
- Explore alternative messages and materials; and
- Fine-tune your messages and materials.

Typically, developing communication materials is a four-step process:

1. Develop prototype;
2. Review and pretest;
3. Revise and refine; and
4. Produce.

There are several ways to pretest messages and materials with your audience, including:

- Surveys (via a free service such as Survey Monkey);
- Focus groups (formal or informal); and
- One-on-one interviews.

For more information on focus group testing, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) information page on Data Collection Methods for Program Evaluation: Focus Groups at [www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief13.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief13.pdf).

Admittedly, if you are planning a face-to-face meeting with an individual who represents a potential audience or partner, it is tough to pretest your message or materials with him or her. In such a case, it is a good idea to rehearse your presentation and ask someone who is not connected with your program’s work to look at your materials. While you may not be able to gauge the impact of what you have developed, you will at least ensure that you are presenting information in a way that is easy to understand.

If your message addresses suicide and/or suicide prevention directly, you may evoke emotional responses in individuals who have related personal experiences. Plan for this possibility by recruiting a social worker, psychologist, counselor or other trained helper to be available as a supportive resource. Have materials on hand that describe the counseling center’s services and how to access the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and provide these materials to all participants, whether or not they appear upset. Lifeline wallet cards can be downloaded or ordered for free through this website: [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

Remember: When creating communication materials, include into your action plan time for pretesting.
Step 8: Implement, Evaluate, and Modify Plan

Purpose: To determine if the plan is meeting your communication goals and, if not, to make appropriate and timely modifications to ensure success.

Managing a communication plan is an ongoing process. Implementation is only the beginning. Consider your communication plan a living document that is revised and fine-tuned over time.

To ensure your communication efforts are effective and successful, you must specify how and when you will evaluate and, if necessary, modify your strategy and action plan. As you roll out your communication plan, create a feedback mechanism to monitor your success. If something in your program or campaign is not working, it is fine to make the modifications necessary to get back on track.

To evaluate the effectiveness of your communication plan, this step asks you to:

- Determine which messages are (and are not) resonating with your audiences;
- Identify the channels, materials, activities, and partnerships that are (and are not) helping you reach and engage your audiences;
- Identify obstacles you had not anticipated;
- Identify any new intended audiences you had not recognized when starting the planning process; and
- Create and implement new strategies for reaching your goals and objectives.

To help develop and test your communication plan, reach out to your SAMHSA Government Project Officer (GPO), or your SPRC Prevention Specialist (PS).

The following document—five case studies focused on evaluation of communication campaigns—may also help you: [www.mediaevaluationproject.org/HFRP2.pdf](http://www.mediaevaluationproject.org/HFRP2.pdf).
Congratulations!

By working through the exercises in this workbook, you have made a genuine commitment to the success and long-term sustainability of your program. You are now thinking strategically to:

- Make the most of your circumstances and available resources;
- Set realistic and actionable goals;
- Identify the specific audience segments most likely to support your efforts;
- Craft messages that resonate with those audiences; and
- Deliver those messages in ways that meet the needs and preferences of your audiences.

Additionally, you recognize that the best plans are worth no more than the paper on which they are written unless they are implemented. Now, you are ready to:

- Make an action plan that assigns tasks and due dates;
- Create, pretest, and produce any materials; and
- Implement, evaluate, and modify your plan.

The communication planning process may seem daunting, but as previously mentioned, it can be a critical tool for communities or campuses that wish to leave a lasting footprint in terms of preventing suicide. By communicating successfully about your program’s achievements, you can help ensure its long-term sustainability.

To achieve your goals, regularly review and revise your plan as needed.
Resources for Health Communication and Social Marketing

BOOKS

Strategic Communication Planning for Your Campus GLS Program

Resources for Health Communication and Social Marketing (continued)

JOURNALS

- American Journal of Health Promotion
  www.healthpromotionjournal.com
- American Journal of Health Behavior
  www.ajhb.org
- American Journal of Public Health
  www.ajph.org
- Health Education & Behavior
  www.sph.umich.edu/hbhe/heb
- Health Education Research
  www.her.oupjournals.org
- Journal of Health Communication
  www.gwu.edu/~cih/journal
- Social Marketing Quarterly
  www.socialmarketingquarterly.com/

WEBSITES

- CDC Social Marketing Information
  www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication
- Health Canada’s Social Marketing Network
  www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/socialmarketing
- National Cancer Institute Pink Book—Making Health Communication Programs Work
  www.cancer.gov/pinkbook
- Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide
  www.reportingonsuicide.org
- Social Marketing Institute
  www.social-marketing.org
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center Library (select the Awareness and Outreach category)
  www.sprc.org/library_resources/listing/search
Planning Worksheets

The following pages offer reproducible versions of all of the planning worksheets found in this workbook.

Feel free to make as many copies as you would like for you and your partners to use.
### Step 1: Assess Your Current Situation

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<th>Opportunities</th>
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Step 2: Set Communication Goals and Objectives

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<tr>
<th>Communication Goals and Objectives</th>
<th>Prioritize 1-5</th>
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<td>Goal 1</td>
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<td>Goal 2</td>
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<td>Goal 3</td>
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<td>Goal 5</td>
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### Step 3: Identify Intended Audiences

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<tr>
<th>Prioritized Goals</th>
<th>List Intended Audiences for Each Goal</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Goal 1</td>
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</table>
Step 3: Identify Intended Audiences *(continued)*

*(Use one worksheet per goal.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Intended Audiences <em>(listed in order of priority for this goal)</em></th>
<th><strong>Consider:</strong> What does each audience want? What do they value? What information sources do they trust? Where can you reach them? What are the barriers to reaching them? What current barriers do they face? What else do you know about them?</th>
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Strategic Communication Planning for Your Campus GLS Program
Step 4: Develop and Pretest Messages

List your **Priority Goal** and your **Target Audience**:

**Priority Goal:**

**Target Audience:**

List some **barriers** and **benefits** to your audience’s thoughts and feelings about or actions on your issue.

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<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
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Now, based on what your audience needs to hear to think, feel, or act differently, what is the **most compelling sentence** you could use to motivate them? (Use the GLS Message Map found in the Message Map section of the toolkit as a guide for ideas.) This sentence is your **message**. (Please note that you may want to adapt this sentence before using it with your key audience.)

---

How will you pretest this message to determine its likelihood of success? (Be sure to examine your message with the **Introduction to Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention** document found in the toolkit.)

---
### Step 5: Select Channels, Activities, and Materials

(Use one worksheet for each audience segment for each goal.)

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<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Intended Audience Segment:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Delivery Methods</th>
<th>Description (Mix)</th>
<th>How often? (Frequency)</th>
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<td>Channel</td>
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<td>Activities and Events</td>
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<td>Materials</td>
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## Step 6: Develop Action Plan

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<th>Task/Subtask</th>
<th>Target Due Date</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
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