Tell Your Story Well: Merging Evaluation and Communication for Sustainability

State/Tribal/Adolescents at Risk
Suicide Prevention Grantees
Technical Assistance Meeting
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Session Objectives

• Review core concepts of communication to get into a “marketing mindset.”

• Understand how communication and evaluation can align to support sustainability.

• Learn how to tell your initiative’s story in ways that compel audience support.
What Is Sustainability?

• Is the benchmark for your success.
• Can mean sustaining existing programs and services, but…
• For most successful initiatives, means shifting focus from sustaining *programs* to sustaining *functions*.
  – Doesn’t matter who is providing services, as long as they’re still being provided!
  – May mean making tough choices—not everything can be sustained!

Shifting Focus to Sustainability

• Starts with creating a basic plan for sustainability.
  – What do you and your partners want to sustain or believe can be sustained?
  – What functions in your plan are already covered?
  – Where are there gaps in your plan?
First: Deepen Existing Partnerships

• Invite partner feedback on the initiative’s progress and their role in it.
• Invite meaningful participation in strategic planning efforts.
• Acknowledge partner support publicly.
• How do you and your partners perceive their roles shifting as the initiative moves towards sustainability?

Who Still Needs To Be at the Table?

• Develop new partners for sustainability
  – Who else needs to be at the table to sustain key functions of your initiative?
  – What are your common goals, mission?
  – How would partnership with your initiative be of benefit to them?
It’s All About THEM!

• Your intended audiences are always at the forefront of your communication.
  – Learn as much as possible about an audience before creating materials and messaging.
  – Create messaging and materials that matter to them.
  – Respect and respond to their needs, values, and beliefs.
  – Craft messages based on what they are able to hear—not necessarily what you think they should hear.

The Typical Approach

• “Experts” tell us what to do because “they know what’s best.”
• Those same experts are baffled when we:
  – Don’t support their programs.
  – Throw away their brochures.
  – Ignore their advice.
• Asking, “What’s WRONG with THEM?!”
A Better Approach: The Marketing Mindset

- What’s wrong with our “product”?  
- Is our message off the mark?  
- Do the benefits offset the costs?  
- Does our product/service align with our audiences’ beliefs, values, goals?

It’s not about us.  
It’s about them.

Exchange Theory

What are you going to give me?  
Does this solve a problem for me?  
What will I have to give up in order to get it?  
Is it worth the effort to me?
A Communication Strategy Can Help

• Reach those audiences who can step in to help fill gaps in your sustainability plan.
  – Is different from those audiences who use your services.
• Improve the likelihood of “getting to yes” with partners, supporters.

Plan Your Communication Strategy

• Working with partners to create a communication strategy can:
  – Provide a strategic “road map” to keep you on task.
  – Support your plans for sustainability.
  – Provide the most bang for your limited time/money.
  – Increase buy-in and commitment from partners.
Create a Communication Plan for Sustainability

Communication + Data/Outcomes = SUSTAINABILITY

- **Compelling** presentation of outcomes is key to sustainability.
  - Requires meeting your audiences “where they are.”
  - Is more than facts—it’s memorable!
- Evaluation collects and assesses information; communication frames and presents it.

Let’s look at the difference between the “evaluation mindset” and the “marketing mindset.”
Evaluators Are From Mars

Show me the numbers.

Deep appreciation for absolutes; risk-averse.

No fear of lengthy, complex, and analytical reports and abstracts.

Process-oriented. The journey may be more important than the goal.

Time takes time—and that's what accurate evaluations need.

Communicators Are From Venus

It's all about the audience.

Generalities are okay; don't mind taking a risk.

Want to see data communicated simply and easily. No jargon, please!

The world is full of AMAZING stories waiting to be told!

Love to talk about successes and challenges.

Goal oriented: Can we see RESULTS?
Can Mars and Venus Align?

- Start working together early; communicate regularly; value each others’ contributions.
- Monitor and share key information to refine:
  - Data collection
  - Communication

Mars and Venus Collaborate

- What types of data do you have right now?
- Does your data come from quality sources?
- What message/story does the data convey?
Mars and Venus Consider the Future

• Who needs to be at the table to sustain your initiative?
• What information do they need to hear?
  – Hard data
  – Anecdotal evidence
  – Combination
• How do you present that information?

Mars and Venus Get To Work

Your father Zeus will be impressed by the number of sit-ups I can do!

• Work together to inventory existing data.
• Identify what your audiences want to know.
• Find gaps and determine how to fill them.

Nope! But he WILL want to know that you’ll be good to me. Got that data?
Mars and Venus Learn To Listen

• Solicit input from partners, stakeholders. Listen to their desired outcomes. For example:
  – School principals are interested in risk reduction and increased test scores.
  – School counselors want to improve student functioning.
  – School district wants better attendance to garner more State/Federal money.

Mars and Venus Order a Medium Popcorn at the Movies

• DATA report:
  – The average “medium” popcorn contains 37 grams of saturated fat.
  – USDA recommends no more than 20 grams per day of saturated fat.

• The COMMUNICATION challenge:
  – Reduce consumption of movie theater popcorn.

Fairly dry statistics! Is there another way?
Mars and Venus Order a Medium Popcorn at the Movies

A bar chart for the AGES!

It’s good, but mind if I try something else?

From the Center for Science in the Public Interest
Data Supports Program Goals

- The programmatic goal:
  - Increase number of children receiving mental health services.
- The communication goal:
  - Improve buy-in from teachers, school staff for mental health referral process.
- The data*:
  - 38.7% of students don’t feel an adult cares about them.
  - 32.3% report experiencing hopelessness.
  - 16.6% have seriously considered suicide.
  - 10.8% have attempted suicide (double State average).

*As reported in latest district survey, students ages 11–17

Sharing the Data: One Way To Go

- 38.7% don’t believe an adult at school cares about them.
- 32.3% experience hopelessness.
- 16.6% have seriously considered suicide.
- 10.8% district youth aged 10–17 have attempted suicide.
Students and Depression
Ages 11–17

One-third experience hopelessness.

One in six seriously consider suicide.

One in ten have attempted suicide at double the State rate.

And more than one-third don’t believe that any of us care.

Evaluation and Communication
1. What are we trying to accomplish?
   – What are our communication goals?
   – Why are we collecting this particular data?
2. Who are our intended audiences?
3. What do they need to know?
4. How are we going to tell them?
## What Are We Trying To Accomplish?

**Potential communication goals:** *(Why this particular data?)*
- Drive program decisions during grant period.
- Show value of program to community partners to garner support for sustainability.
- Convince superintendent to reallocate funds to continue teacher training programs.
- Determine how program implementation impacts results.
- Convince teachers to add yet another thing into their already packed schedules.
- Show amazing success of your initiative to your GPO.

## Who Are Our Intended Audiences?

- What types of partners do we need to reach?
- What do we know about them?
- How will we learn more about them?
Who Are Our Intended Audiences?

• Consider the possible sectors:
  – Statewide Suicide Prevention Coalitions
  – Policymakers: local to national level
  – Community leaders/opinion makers
  – Business leaders
  – Nonprofit and foundation leaders
  – Faith-based community
  – School districts and more…

Intended Audience Brainstorm

• Who are we missing?
• Are all relevant sectors represented?
• Who might help us identify additional partners?
Let’s Prioritize

• Who is our most important potential partner for the identified goal?
• Using this group, what do we know about them?
• What partners are a priority?

Evaluation and Communication

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. Who are our intended audiences?
3. **What do they need to know?**
4. How are we going to tell them?
What Do the Audiences Need/Want To Know?

• *Audience input is essential*…
  – What’s their definition of success?
  – What are their priorities?
  – What are they interested in?
  – What information do they trust?
  – What level of technical detail do they demand?
  – What data do you need to tell your story?
  – How do they currently receive information?

  …*Audience input is essential.*

Exercise

• Break into small groups based on selected audience.

• Do a quick analysis of your audience.
  – What do we know about them?
  – How will we learn more?
Evaluation and Communication

1. What are we trying to accomplish?
2. Who are our intended audiences?
3. What do they need to know?
4. How are we going to tell them?

What Do We Need To Say to Our Audience To Get Them To Join Us?

• Effective messages:
  – Are based on audience’s attitudes, practices, values and beliefs.
  – Solve a problem for the audience.
  – Motivate the audience to think, feel and ACT.
  – Make sense to your audience.
Common Mistakes in Message Development

- **Mistake #1**
  - Too much information
  - Not enough values
- **Mistake #2**
  - Attempts to change values of intended audience instead of meeting them where they start, with what they value.
- **Mistake #3**
  - Overlooks pretesting and revising.

Creating Materials/Messages for a Particular Audience

- **Use evaluation data to tell your success stories.**
- **Use data to talk about:**
  - Trends
  - Successes/need to sustain successes
  - Big ideas/a vision of future success
How Will We Deliver the Message?

• What channels are most appropriate for the audience?
• Do we need to develop our own special activities?
  – Can we build on existing activities?
• Do materials need to be developed?

Typical Delivery Channels

• Interpersonal
  – Individual people, one-on-one
• Community based
  – Schools, malls, parks, employers, nonprofit organizations
• Mass media
  – Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet
## Activities, Events, and Materials

### Activities and Events:
- Awareness Day Presentation
- News conferences
- Editorial board meetings
- Benefit races
- Parades
- Blogs and listservs
- Conferences
- One-on-one meetings
- More…

### Materials:
- News releases
- Flyers and brochures
- Fact sheets
- Bookmarks
- Web sites
- PowerPoint presentations
- Videos/PSAs
- More…

## How Will We Deliver the Message to Our Audience?

- Use your audience research to answer the following:
  - How do we best reach our audience?
  - Where do they live, work, and play?
  - Whom do they trust?
  - How do we get others to help?
Pulling It All Together

A couple of examples…

- Intended audience: Project director
- Programmatic goal:
  - Ensure program is implemented to fidelity.
- Communication goal:
  - Drive program decisions during grant period.
- Messaging (what do we need to tell them?)
  - Straightforward report of all data
  - Not pass vs. fail, but pointing out how to improve quality
- Channel (how are we going to tell them?)
  - Bound report with easy-to-read executive summary
Pulling It All Together: Another Example

- **Intended audience:** Teachers
- **Programmatic goal:**
  - Implement anti-bullying curriculum in all elementary schools.
- **Communication goal:**
  - Convince teachers to implement anti-bullying curriculum (aka “yet another program”).
- **Messaging**
  - Present data that shows program will reduce classroom disruptions allowing more time to teach.
- **Channel**
  - Have a teacher who has used the program present the data and talk to the teachers about the difference it’s made.

Your Turn To Pull It All Together

- Take a few minutes to draft a plan for your initiative.
  - Intended audience
  - Programmatic goal
  - Communication goal
  - Messaging: (what do we need to tell them?) include data reference
  - Channel (how are we going to tell them?)
Questions?

Adrienne Dealy
Communication Specialist
1–800–790–2647 ext. 4967
Adrienne.A.Dealy@MacroInternational.com