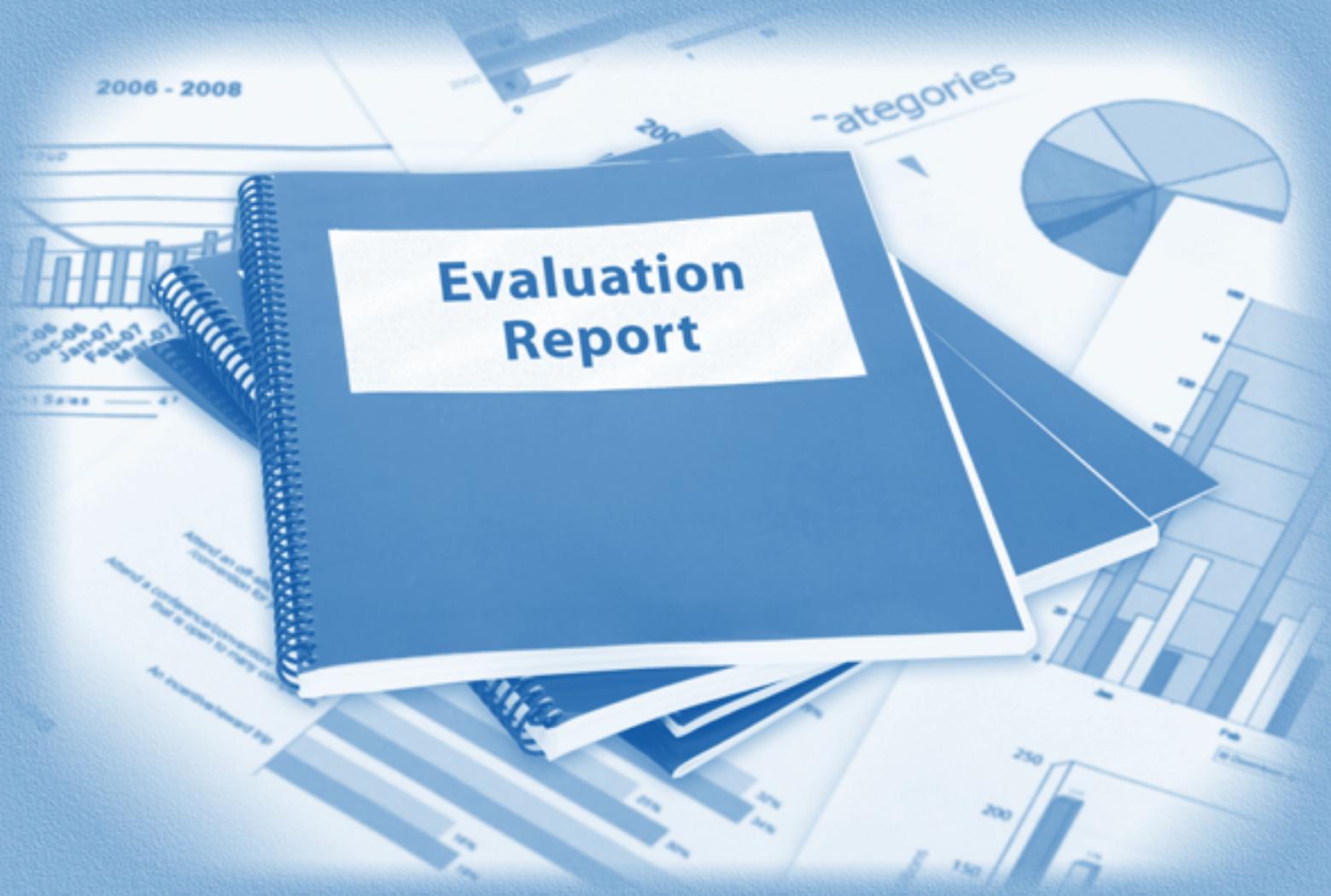

Technical Assistance Piece for Abstinence Education Grantees



Translating Evaluation Results to Published Documents

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Abstinence Education Grantees*

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Introduction

Program evaluation is a key component of Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) grants. Through evaluation, grantees learn valuable lessons about the effectiveness of their programs and what works. When grantees communicate and share evaluation results with the public, they increase community awareness and acceptance of an important public health message, contribute to the field of abstinence education by identifying best practices, and encourage widespread adoption by other organizations, service providers, and community stakeholders of effective abstinence education programs, strategies, and messages.

All of these factors promote long-term sustainability of abstinence education in communities. Programs and organizations that show, through evaluation, that they have the capability and capacity to meet timelines, budget, and goals are far more likely to increase the financial support they require, either through local donations or the competitive grant process.

Yet how do you create a dissemination effort? What evaluation results will you use? Who should receive information about your program's success? What mediums and methods should you employ to share your results, and when? What do you hope to accomplish by communicating your evaluation results, and how will you know whether you've met your communication goals—or *not*?

This technical assistance (TA) piece provides answers to these questions and will give you a solid understanding of the process:

- Develop a communications plan and put it into action
- Choose and prioritize valid results to communicate and share
- Identify and select audiences to receive information

- Construct meaningful and useful messages so the audience will act on the information
- Pretest messages and public document materials to ensure your resources are well used and targeted
- Develop methods to monitor and evaluate the success of your communication effort, so that future efforts enjoy even greater success

It is important to review some background material that will help you understand dissemination planning, its end purpose, and the benefits you can realize at an organizational level when you translate evaluation results into public documents.

The Communication Planning Process

Dissemination

The word “disseminate” comes from the Latin word *disseminare*—to scatter seed. Few farmers expecting to raise a productive crop would sow seeds without planning or forethought; neither would they plant corn where only cactuses grow. It makes sense, then, that a grantee considering a public dissemination effort would also want to develop a communications plan, to ensure the knowledge seeds sown grow and flourish.

Dissemination is communication and consists of written information. Like a farmer scattering seed far and wide, grantees wishing to spread their message must also go far and wide, broad and deep, reaching a variety of audiences. To engineer such expansive coverage, they will use multiple formats and channels, discussed later in detail. For now, keep in mind that formats are the products you develop, such as brochures, and channels are the conduits through which products reach your audience, for example newspapers, health fairs, TV, or radio.

Dissemination, when effectively executed, has the potential to serve several purposes:

- Educate Federal decision makers about program impacts and program accountability
- Broaden the knowledge and technical skills of professionals working in abstinence education and related fields
- Educate the nation about health issues affecting youth
- Influence the shaping of positive attitudes among and for the benefit of youth
- Debunk myths and provide accurate information
- Identify best practices
- Enable other organizations to replicate effective programs and strategies
- Attract new donors and encourage current ones to continue

Benefits for Your Program and Organization

At a local level, you can reap great benefits by disseminating—or communicating—evaluation results to the public. If you communicate written information showcasing your successes, you demonstrate the capability to produce results-oriented programs. This will bring positive recognition to your organization and may strengthen your ability to attract new funding and donations, increase community and volunteer support, expand constituent services, increase demand for services, and lead to greater success when you apply for Federal and state dollars.

Disseminating your information to your audiences and the broader community increases awareness of problems and solutions, and acceptance of abstinence education as an important public health message; motivates support of abstinence education efforts and messages in the community; and encourages an expectation for youth to adopt healthy attitudes, perceptions, and lifestyles.

In this way, the community helps you achieve your communication goals and your CBAE program goals, and your efforts (communication and programmatic) will be more likely to sustain for years to come.

A Planning Framework

To achieve the wide-ranging potential benefits of sharing results with the public, you must have a plan of action. Think back to when you first applied for your CBAE grant. More than likely, you used a planning framework that reflected the most current knowledge available about effective abstinence education approaches, programs, and strategies. Embarking on a dissemination effort also requires a planning framework, one based on effectiveness and relevant to the long-term behavioral health changes CBAE grantees strive to promote in youth.

One such framework, known as the *Health Communication Program Cycle*, is presented by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in its publication *Making Health Communications Work*. While the planning steps described in this publication apply to comprehensive health communications programs involving social marketing, many of the strategies discussed equally apply and adapt to smaller dissemination activities.

The *Health Communication Program Cycle* consists of four stages:

- Planning and Strategy Development
- Developing and Pretesting Concepts, Messages, and Materials
- Implementing the Program
- Assessing Effectiveness and Making Refinements

This TA piece focuses on the first stage, Planning and Strategy Development. See Appendix A for an outline of the four stages of the *Health Communication Program Cycle*.

Planning Step 1: Choosing Results

The first step in planning a dissemination activity is to choose evaluation results to shape communication messages for public consumption. This is a critical step because the results you select drive the subsequent steps of the planning process.

Identifying Valid Quantitative and Qualitative Results

When choosing results, you want to be sure that they are valid. The best place to find valid results is in the semi-annual or annual evaluation report that your evaluator prepares for your project. Typically, CBAE evaluations consist of two components: process and outcome. It is from these reports that you will select the results to communicate.

Process Results

Process evaluation explains the *Who, What, Where,* and *How* of your program. It usually documents and measures the activities you perform in support of program goals and objectives, for example, delivering curricula, sponsoring youth clubs, mentoring students, meeting with grant partners, or training other professionals. It also assesses the historical and chronological progress you are making toward achieving outcome goals and objectives, for example, through meeting project timelines, implementing the grant management plan, identifying program barriers, and finding solutions.

Process results can reflect quantitative information:

- Number of non-duplicated participants served based on attendance records
- Number of hours of curriculum delivered according to service logs

- Number of newsletters sent to community stakeholders
- Number of hours of training provided to each abstinence educator

Process results also can be qualitative, reflecting achievement of program inputs or internal and external outputs, or development of an effective management tool:

- Creation of an achievable sustainability plan (*input*)
- Development of a website for parents of teens (*internal output*)
- Development of a pilot-tested, promising curriculum (*external output*)
- Effective use of Logic Models to manage program activities and timelines (*tool*)

Outcome Results

Outcome results align to broad program goals and objectives and reflect observable increases or changes in participant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior. Such results are quantitative, generate from survey or indicator data, and tell you whether your CBAE program is producing a statistically significant desirable change—one that is real and not simply a function of chance—in your target population.

You might choose to disseminate the following examples of outcome results:

- Significant increase from pretest to posttest participant knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and their consequences
- Significant increase from pretest to posttest participants holding attitudes that sexual intercourse should be reserved for marriage

- Significant increase from pretest to posttest participant skill to refuse a dating partner's pressure to engage in sexual activity
- Significant decrease or delay from pretest to six-month posttest of participant behavioral involvement in sexual intercourse

Your program may not produce significant outcome results immediately, even though progress is evident. For example, in the first year of your program, you might see students improve knowledge by 10 percent; in the second year, by 20 percent; and in the third year, by 30 percent. This would indicate a promising trend: each benchmark year demonstrates you made progress toward meeting an overall program goal. Such trends may be of great interest to grant partners, community stakeholders, school administrators, parents, and potential donors. However, when selecting benchmark or trend data to disseminate, be sure to consult your evaluator. Confirm that your interpretation of these results is correct, valid, and worthy of public dissemination.

Whether choosing to disseminate process or outcome evaluation results, it is important that the ones you select reflect valid, substantiated findings. Make certain quantitative results link to an assessment measure, such as attendance records, key informant surveys, or participant pre- and posttest surveys. For qualitative results, make sure you've generated a tangible product, for example, a curriculum or website, and that it has proven valuable.

Prioritizing the Information to Communicate

After you have reviewed your semi-annual or annual report and identified valid quantitative or qualitative results, prioritize the information to disseminate. To do that, you must know what you want to accomplish as the result of your communication effort. Specifically, you

need to identify what goals your dissemination effort will help you achieve in terms of function, maximum result, and timeliness.

Function

Several functions of dissemination were highlighted above. In brief, dissemination serves to educate, inform, and influence a variety of audiences about important health issues and to expand the adoption of effective strategies that lead to healthier lifestyles. An effective dissemination effort also can bring recognition to a CBAE organization or program. Review your results and identify the function they serve. Ideally, the results you communicate will serve several. For example, if your program resulted in a decrease in the number of high school students engaging in sexual activity, communicating these results could serve the following functions:

- Bringing recognition to your organization and program
- Educating parents, health personnel, social service agencies, and community stakeholders about the effectiveness of abstinence education
- Informing public opinion about the health benefits of abstinence education, such as reduced rates of STDs or out-of-wedlock births to teen mothers
- Educating other professionals working with high school students on best practice approaches to risk reduction

Maximum Result

Next, examine evaluation results in the context of maximum communication result. In the example above, you see that one result can serve many functions (and reach several audiences). However, it may not be feasible for you to embark on an all-out effort for a variety of reasons, including budget. Therefore, select the results that will bring you the most benefit. Let's look at an example.

A CBAE program finds it is serving many more schools and students than initially projected and budgeted. Process evaluation results suggest this relates to new state educational guidelines requiring abstinence education in schools; they also identify that increased demand for the grantee's services is taking a toll on project staff. The grantee is elated at its success and wonders if it should share this information with the public. After all, it would bring the organization recognition and, possibly, donations to support the hiring of more staff. It could also serve to educate the public on the new state guidelines and promote acceptance of abstinence education in schools. However, the grantee is at capacity now; further promotion of the program might result in even more requests for service. Until the grantee can hire more staff, it has to manage carefully both the publicity it generates about the program as well as its organizational workload.

Given these circumstances, a number of benefits are identifiable—but which would bring the grantee the maximum result? If staff advertise the program's success, donations might increase and the project director could hire necessary staff to meet the workload. Alternatively, service demand might increase before the program is staffed enough to meet it, causing frustration and low morale. If staff trained others, such as school-based health educators, using a replication manual, they might find a way to sustain the program as well as meet current and rising demand. On the other hand, managing the use of a curriculum is difficult when non-grantee staff start implementing it; monitoring implementation by others might be as unwieldy as attempting to serve additional schools and students with current project staff.

From these options, you can see that identifying maximum result is not cut and dry. Rather, determining what is best for the project, your organization, and the

community takes strategic planning. Carefully weigh the results you plan to disseminate and determine which best enhances your project or organization.

Timeliness

Finally, examine results for timeliness. Is this information the consumer needs and can use now—or will they view it as “old” news or irrelevant? Timeliness also refers to current issues. For example, the publication of results from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey at a national level might tie to your results at the local level. Piggybacking your information on the CDC information may prove beneficial. Timeliness also pertains to function and the maximum results you set out to achieve. For example, if you sponsored a parent education program, it is important to meet press deadlines if you want your announcement published before—rather than after—the event takes place. In the example discussed above, the timeliness of releasing the program information requires careful consideration of each potential communication result.

Setting Dissemination Goals

Once you have selected and prioritized valid results based on function, maximum result, and timeliness, you are ready to identify what you hope to achieve from translating evaluation results into public documents. Your dissemination or communication goals should be measurable. They do not need to be elaborate, but they should be doable. The tables on the next page show dissemination goals you could structure as part of the planning process. Note how each defines the function, a maximum result, and time.

Developing dissemination goals helps you identify what you hope to accomplish as the result of your communication efforts. It also helps you identify your potential audiences and their informational needs.

| |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Outcome Results |
| Significant pre-post knowledge, skill, and attitudinal change; significant long-term behavioral change |
| Dissemination Goals |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the next six months, inform grant partners and community stakeholders of program accountability and accomplishments so that they are willing to contribute more of their resources to sustain the program, post-grant. By the beginning of the first semester, influence schools to continue or expand CBAE, classroom-based effective programs so that significantly more students receive services over the next 12-month period. Three months before the end of the grant, teach youth-serving agencies and health teachers to replicate curriculum with fidelity so that they can sustain abstinence education programs in the community, post-grant. Quarterly, advocate community expansion of effective decision-making programs for adolescents so that by the end of the grant, significantly more risk-reduction programs and alternative social opportunities are available to teens in the community. |
| Process Result |
| Development of a website for parents of teens |
| Dissemination Goals |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three weeks before launching, inform parents, schools, and youth-serving agencies of the website and its purpose so that by the end of the first quarter, 200 non-duplicated individuals access the site. At the national conference, transfer website design knowledge and skills to CBAE project directors as a means of expanding the flow of important health information to the public. One week before launching, train classroom educators and nonprofit providers how to access and effectively use the website, so they can download educational curricula and TA information. Quarterly, promote and market the CBAE program through an online newsletter, highlighting CBAE progress, outcomes, and information to donors, parents, and youth as a means to promote the organization, increase donations, and expand constituencies. |

Planning Step 2: Selecting Audiences

Audiences play a significant role in a dissemination effort: they shape the content of your messages and determine the formats and channels you'll use to send messages and reach audiences. Different audiences have different information needs. For audiences to absorb and act on your message, it must have meaning and utility for them, and they must be able to access it. Therefore, it is important that you determine who your audiences are, what information they need, and what information they will use and act upon.

Specifying Audience Types

You have the opportunity to reach several different kinds of audiences, including youth, parents, educators, health and service providers, faith communities, and decision makers.

However, the information you communicate will not apply to all of these audiences; therefore, it is necessary to streamline these audiences into two groups: primary users and secondary users.

Primary Users

You may think of your primary population or audience as the youth you serve. However, from a dissemination standpoint, primary users tend to be individuals with decision-making power and influence, and can include many types of people:

- State and local officials
- Federal or state funding agencies and project officers
- Program administrators
- Grant partners, donors, and advisory committees
- CBAE organization Boards of Directors

Such audiences seek detailed information demonstrating accountability:

- Progress toward achieving program goals and objectives
- Meeting or exceeding the expected number of participants served
- Delivering planned services on time and as described in the grant application
- Proper management of grant dollars, organizational resources, and grant partner contributions
- Expectations and plans for the next grant year

Secondary Users

Secondary users include a much broader array of audiences and often are the individuals who exert influence on primary users:

- Constituents, such as teens, parents, and families
- Complementary youth-serving providers
- Schools and educators
- Faith-based communities
- Health and mental health providers
- CBAE grantees and their evaluators

Secondary user informational needs vary and in some ways are more personal. For example, parent audiences might be interested in having information that will help them support and reinforce their teens' commitment to abstinence. CBAE grantees and evaluator audiences might need information about promising program strategies or new analytic methods. Health educators might want information about changing adolescent health needs in the community. The key to a successful communications effort, therefore, is to link valid results to your audience and its needs.

Determining Audience Needs and Makeup

Knowing your audiences' informational needs is as critical as understanding the needs of the CBAE target populations you serve. When planning an intervention program, you examine the population's risk factors,

age, gender, developmental issues, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors and influencers. You ensure the materials you use and the approaches you design match and complement your constituency.

In communications planning, you examine some of the same factors and demographics. Therefore, the next step you will take is to identify information about your potential audiences. Specifically, you need to know the following:

- Whether they are primary or secondary users of information
- Their roles in the community: families, parents, youth, peer groups, schools, decision makers, donors, service providers, health providers, or faith-based entities
- Their demographic makeup: race/ethnicity, gender, age, cultural values and beliefs, literacy and language levels, and languages spoken
- The places they gather: community centers, schools, health departments, sporting activities, the workplace, or through formal or informal social networks
- Their access to electronic media, such as computers and text messaging
- The problems they face and the relevance of the information to these problems

Keep a couple of other things in mind as you plan:

- Different users need different information about the same issue or problem. Your results will mean one thing to parents, another to decision makers and donors, and yet another to your professional peers.
- Some users do not know what information they need. Before releasing your results, you may have to stage the flow of information, for example, first educating the public on a health problem and then informing the public of effective solutions to the problem.

- Some users will expect you to support a particular advocacy position or point of view rather than provide them with factual information. Expect to receive criticism from some audiences—you can't please everyone. Further, you may first have to build confidence and rapport with certain audiences before releasing your results.
- Over the course of time, information needs change within the same audience. Stay current with changing conditions in your community, especially the problems of youth and families. Know what is important to them and attempt to meet their changing information needs. One year they may seek information to help teens resist alcohol; the next year, they may be concerned about date rape. Find ways to link your results to changing issues in a way that will address or solve as many problems for your audiences as possible with the resources available.

Linking Audiences to Results

It is important for you to know your audiences, their information needs, and their point of view, and remain aware of changing conditions, attitudes, and behaviors in the community. Ask yourself and your communication planning team a series of questions that will help you successfully link potential audiences to results:

- Are the results relevant to the audience? Information that is important to one person or group may be of no consequence to another. Identify the audiences that will view your information as relevant.
- Are the results practical and useful? For audiences to absorb and act on your information, they must be able to make use of it at home, in school, in their programs, or in the workplace. Determine whether your information is of use to prospective audiences before including them in your communications effort.
- Are the results credible to some or all audiences? The consumer must perceive your information to be

fact-based and reasonable. The results you share will either validate or change the audiences' viewpoints, attitudes, or beliefs, and they should match the audiences' normative beliefs and expectations. Analyze whether the information falls outside of the mainstream of the audiences' normative personal, professional, or cultural beliefs and expectations.

- Are the results accessible and understandable? Your information must be accessible in languages your audiences speak and at their reading and literacy levels. They must have access to the information, either in places where they gather or electronically. Identify whether your organization has the capacity to reach audiences who speak languages other than English, do not own computers, or are more comfortable receiving information one-on-one rather than in group settings.

You'll consider these same issues when you construct your messages and when selecting the formats and channels you'll use to deliver them. Overall, these issues determine whether your audiences understand the messages you convey and whether they act on the message as you envisioned.

Planning Step 3: Constructing Messages

Shaping the Message to Match the Audience

To demonstrate the importance of message content among different audiences, examine the example below. Each of the four sample audiences viewed the grantee's evaluation results differently.

ABC Grantee found that after two years of abstinence education, high school girls significantly reduced their involvement in sexual activity. Girls who reduced their involvement also significantly increased self-esteem and assertiveness. Grantee staff decided to communicate only the main result—reduction in female sexual activity—

to four audiences: parents, school partners, peer project directors, and CBAE program evaluators. They determined the best way to reach these audiences was through a press release published in the local newspaper and an email sent to all CBAE grantees. Three weeks after releasing the information, they analyzed the audience feedback they'd received thus far.

Parents wanted to know, "What else is new?" After all, girls are not nearly as sexually active as boys. Three high school principals who hosted the CBAE program also sponsored onsite daycare programs for babies born to teen moms at their schools. They disputed the findings because they hadn't yet seen a decrease in daycare enrollment levels. Project directors offered congratulations but wanted to know how the grantee achieved the results. Evaluators asked why boys didn't change at the same rate as girls; they speculated that perhaps the curriculum generalized only to females or there were problems with the analyses.

Clearly, the information the grantee released—though valid and substantiated—did not get through to its audiences. Parents dismissed the information, school administrators disputed it, project directors sought how-to instructions, and evaluators questioned the findings based on professional expectations.

Below are potential solutions to the problems ABC Grantee encountered in its dissemination effort. These solutions reflect audience information needs and expectations, and identify other content information the grantee might have included as part of its dissemination effort to meet these various needs and expectations.

Audience: Parents

Need/Expectation: Why is this information important to me? It doesn't match my belief system.

Possible Approach:

- Educate parents about growing rates of girls with STDs and teen pregnancies

- Identify relationship between self-esteem and assertiveness, and refusal skills
- Identify strategies parents can use at home with their daughters to support decision making and healthy lifestyle choices
- Provide tips to help parents of boys understand the consequences of premarital sexual activity

Audience: School principals

Need/Expectation: Show me how your program is going to reduce teen pregnancy at my school and explain why I don't see a change yet.

Possible Approach:

- Educate schools on the process of change using health behavioral change models
- Link self-esteem and assertiveness to reductions in sexual activity
- Identify methods schools can use to support females in the classroom
- Identify other positive trends of change in the population or program
- Explain change takes time, and advocate activities schools can engage in with younger females to ensure reductions continue

Audience: Project directors

Need/Expectation: Show me how to achieve the same results.

Possible Approach:

- Describe the curriculum or program
- Identify implementation problems and how you solved them
- Detail the program's cost and necessary staffing
- Provide TA or develop a replication manual

Audience: Evaluators

Need/Expectation: Explain how this happened and describe the analytic methods you used.

Possible Approach:

- Provide technical information describing the population, attrition, and pretest differences between boys and girls
- Describe the analytic methods your evaluator used
- Describe correlation of self-esteem and assertiveness on reduced involvement in sexual activity
- Indicate information requiring further study

From the examples above, you see that each audience required different information from the grantee. In the case of parents, the grantee needed to debunk a myth first, and then provide information parents could use at home with daughters as well as sons. Before school administrators could accept program results as being credible, the grantee had to first provide information about the process of change and then offer tips schools might employ to enhance the program's effectiveness. Project directors wanted hands-on information, not simply a discussion of the positive findings. Evaluators sought technical information that explained how the grantee's evaluator arrived at his or her conclusions. As you shape message content, carefully analyze each audience. What works for one may not work for all.

Developing Understandable Messages

Besides ensuring that the content of your message meets your audiences' needs and expectations, you need to ensure your audiences understand the messages.

Plain Language Guidelines

In June 1998, the Clinton Administration issued a *Presidential Memorandum on Plain Language*, which mandated that all government agencies write external documents so that the public could understand their meaning and content. Examples of Plain Language-formatted materials are the Health Insurance Portability

and Accountability Act forms patients sign at the doctor's office and correspondence from the Internal Revenue Service. The language, wording, and ease of use of Federal grant application documents have recently changed, also. Plain Language is intended to improve communication between the government and the public by mandating clear and concise public documents.

When you develop your dissemination products, consider the structural components of Plain Language. These guidelines ensure the information you convey to the public achieves the following:

- Answers the reader's questions
- Uses only the information the reader needs
- Places information of greatest interest to the reader at the beginning of the document
- Uses language appropriate for the reader
- Summarizes complicated topics before describing details
- Begins with general information before moving on to the specific
- Uses active rather than passive voice
- Uses personal pronouns such as "we" and "you"
- Breaks up narrative using short sentences and paragraphs
- Employs tables, lists, bullets, other easy-to-understand features, and "white space"

National Institutes of Health Reading Guidelines

Besides following Plain Language structural guidelines, be sure your information is reading-level appropriate. Since there is no way to assess the reading level of everyone who will access your dissemination piece, you can use the following guidelines published by the National Institutes of Health (NIH):

- Public information materials and public notices should meet a 4th to 8th grade reading level

- Technical and legal information, such as grant applications and information for medical students (or other professionals) should be written at an 8th grade and higher level
- Technical or research information (such as journal articles) often are written at acceptable higher reading levels (for example, 11th or 12th grade)

Word processing software programs, such as Microsoft Word, include readability ratings, which you can access through spell-check. For example, in Microsoft Word, readability categories consist of reading ease and grade level (a Flesch-Kincaid score by school-grade level, e.g., 8th, 12th). The readability application also scores the percentage of passive sentences contained in your document. After you write your dissemination piece, check it for readability to be sure it matches the NIH guidelines for the intended audience and type of format you intend to use. For more information about NIH Plain Language Guidelines, go to <http://execsec.od.nih.gov/plainlang/guidelines/what.html>.

Language and Culture

As you begin to construct your message, consider language and culture; that is, race/ethnicity, country of origin, educational levels, native language, and cultural values and beliefs. You must consider these issues if you want your audience to access, understand, and benefit from your message. The last thing you want to do is offend your audience through the words you use or the cultural expectations you inadvertently set.

Language and culture also applies to professionals and organizations. These audiences often use a language or lexicon of words in their work and set expectations about how written information should look. Plain Language guidelines strongly encourage writers of public documents to stay away from jargon. However, sometimes it is necessary from the audiences' language and cultural perspective to do so. The examples below demonstrate by audience type how you might describe

| Audience | Description of "direct program participants" |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Parents | Teens, kids who took part in the program |
| Teachers | Students completing the curriculum |
| Evaluators | Intervention group, study sample, treatment group completing adequate hours of service |

"direct program participants" so that the phrase meets the language and cultural expectations of three different audiences.

Slant and Motivation

"Slant" describes the approach you use to convey information, a point of view, attitude, or bias. In professional marketing, slant is the way advertisers reach ready-to-purchase audiences, tailoring ads and commercials to match research-tested consumer wants, needs, and desires. Professional marketers also set out to tantalize consumers, motivating them to buy something they want or need—or don't want or need.

In health communications, "slant" refers to shaping messages to your various audiences' information needs. As with commercial marketing, it also applies to motivation. Just as advertisers of automobiles or cell phone products seek to motivate consumers using research-tested approaches, CBAE grantees also seek to motivate respective audiences using research-based models. While you may not ask your audiences to buy a product, you do want them to buy into your message, donate to your organization, and help you reach your dissemination goals.

Therefore, when you develop and later pretest products, consider the motivational slant or approach of the message and materials. A wealth of research exists about health motivation models, for example, Stages of Change, Health Belief Model, and PRECEDE-PROCEED. Using a model of health behavior change to underpin messages increases the likelihood that intended audiences will respond to and act on your

information. You can locate these and additional health behavior change models in the National Cancer Institute publication *Theory at a Glance*.

Planning Step 4: Choosing Formats and Channels

Formats are the products you will develop, such as brochures, newsletters, replication manuals, or posters. Channels are the media through which you will disseminate your products, such as newspapers, websites, listservs, professional publications, or public events.

Certain formats and channels are more accessible to some audiences than are others.

To identify the potential formats you can develop to send your messages, ask yourself a few questions:

- Does the audience have access to email, text messaging, and the Internet? Your answer determines whether you can use electronic media, such as website newsletters or info-text messages, or if you are restricted to written formats, such as brochures and posters.
- Does the audience gather at schools, health departments, youth and sporting events, faith-based institutions, or doctors' offices? This question helps you determine locations through which you can disseminate information.
- Do you want to raise the level of awareness about a problem, educate the population, train other professionals, or inform decision makers and community stakeholders? This question helps you identify the type of product you can develop, for example, a press release to raise public awareness, a brochure to educate parents, a train-the-trainer program for other professionals, or an informational FAQ sheet for community decision makers.

- Do we want to send brief information, staged information, or in-depth information? The answer to this question will help you decide whether your communication will be a one-time event of short duration (e.g., a brochure disseminated once), a series of informational communications (e.g., a four-stage, how-to piece published on your website), or an in-depth piece (e.g., a replication manual, needs assessment, or journal article).

The table on the next page displays some of the formats and channels you might think about using among various audiences.

Planning Step 5: Pretesting Content, Formats, and Channels

Once you structure your message and select formats and channels, you will test your ideas, concepts, and materials with a sample audience. Pretesting communications increases the likelihood that you will effectively and responsibly use organizational time, talent, and resources; achieve dissemination goals; and construct messages that are audience-sensitive. However, before you can test, you must design your questions.

The Questions Pretesting Will Answer

The main questions pretesting should answer relate to meaning and utility of the message as well as the audiences' access to the proposed formats and channels. By the time you reach this stage of the planning process, you should have a good idea of the answers to most of these questions. However, pretesting confirms through audience feedback whether you are on the right track.

Meaning and Utility

Pretesting efforts should result in answering the following questions:

| Audience | Format | Channels |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Parents, teens, service providers, health departments, information and referral agents (e.g., guidance counselors) | Brochure | Third-party providers (schools, health departments, health networks, parent/teacher organizations) |
| Parents, donors, board members, educators | Newsletter | Bulk mail, online |
| Local or regional community decision makers | Letter to Editor, Op-Ed | Online or printed newspaper |
| CBAE project directors, other professionals, health educators, other nonprofits | How-to article, train-the-trainer presentation | Publication, face-to-face in-service, conference presentation |
| Grant partners, local decision makers | Executive summary | Partner meeting |
| Congressional representatives, local policy makers, funding organizations, service providers | FAQ sheet | Direct mail, online |
| Health educators, project staff, peer project directors | Replication manual | Publication, hard copy or online download |
| Community, donors, constituents, partners | Public service announcement | TV, radio |
| Peers, evaluators, other professionals | Conference presentation | Face-to-face delivery |
| | Article | Peer-reviewed journal |
| | Evaluation report | Monograph, oral presentation to community stakeholders |
| Community, donors, constituents, funding organizations, parents, and educators | Website | Internet |

- Does the intended audience understand the message? This pertains to language, reading level, and gist—does the audience “get it”? Is its interpretation of the message the same as your own?
- What works and what doesn’t? Do materials attract the readers’ attention, inform them, or motivate them to take action—either as a community, decision maker, donor or potential donor, or professional organization, or within their families?
- Can the audience identify with the information? Does the information have meaning and relevance?

Does it satisfy the audience’s information needs? Is it something the audience can—and will—use?

- Does the message contain information that is confusing, sensitive, or controversial? Is there anything in the message that offends or makes the audience uncomfortable?

Access

You need to know where to reach your audiences. Therefore, it is important to include questions about audience access. For example, if parents of teens were the intended audience, you might ask whether it is

better to reach them through their kids at school, by email or text message, via regular mail, or through your website.

If you develop materials for dissemination through complementary service providers, such as health departments, recreation centers, physicians, or mental health professionals, you might ask the following questions:

- How many clients do they see daily or weekly?
- Do clients request the kind of information you intend to provide?
- How does the provider display public information documents, such as newsletters, brochures, or FAQ sheets: out in the open, on lobby tables and racks; or in filing cabinets or employee desks, available only upon client request?
- Is the provider willing to accept and disseminate your materials?

Certain public entity organizations, such as school districts, restrict information disseminated by outside organizations, or they require advance review and approval of materials by school board members, principals, or public information officers. Find out if such a policy exists, and, if so, identify the steps your organization must take to reach parent, teen, or educator audiences through schools.

Methods of Pretesting

There are several viable methods of pretesting messages and materials. Below are three efficient and cost-effective methods you might consider as part of the planning process.

Focus Groups

You can conduct focus groups the “old-fashioned way”—in person and face-to-face—or, with technology advances, you can use multiple-participant telephone conference calling or an online webinar service. If you

use telephonic or electronic focus groups, be sure your audience has access to these technological methods of participation and you have a means of getting materials to them in advance of the focus group.

It is crucial to ensure that your focus group participants are representative of your intended audience with respect to age range, gender, race/ethnicity, educational level, and socioeconomics, and that your focus group leader is fluent in the language the audience speaks. You also need to engage enough participants to provide objective and diverse feedback, yet not so many that the focus group becomes burdensome, confusing, or inefficient. Attempt to recruit more participants than you will need—not everyone invited will show up. Ideally, you should strive to have nine or ten focus group members participate.

While focus groups tend to be open-ended, with posed questions and recorded audience feedback, you also might consider asking participants to complete a short, anonymous questionnaire identifying who they are demographically. When you analyze the results of your focus group, it is helpful to have concrete evidence linking audience feedback to demographics. This is particularly true when you conduct more than one focus group, with audiences of similar or vastly different makeup. Correlating demographics to audience response will help you identify agreement and disagreement among groups.

Secondary audiences may be more likely to participate in focus groups than will primary audiences. However, you can reach busy decision makers in a focus group-like setting through CBAE grant partner meetings or during regularly scheduled, community meetings.

Questionnaires

Especially with primary audiences, questionnaires or surveys may serve as one method of pilot testing messages and materials. Written assessments such as these can be conducted via mail, email, or an

online survey service. Questionnaires should include participant demographic items as well as Likert-scaled opinion items reflecting the content and display of your dissemination piece. If you mail surveys, be certain you include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return. Whether you mail or electronically transmit questionnaires, include a due date and plan to follow up more than once to ensure you receive as many returned surveys as possible. Your evaluator can help you construct a valid questionnaire and assist with interpreting its results.

Expert Review

If you don't have the resources or time to conduct focus groups or disseminate and process questionnaires, you can have messages and materials reviewed by experts or gatekeepers. Even if you do conduct other methods of pretesting, expert reviewers can validate initial findings of focus groups and surveys. Expert reviewers include public service directors, medical personnel, teachers, partner organizations, and faith community leaders. Ideally, these reviewers will be familiar with your intended audience and will have the ability to assess the viability of your materials with these audiences. Involving expert reviewers or gatekeepers also increases the likelihood they will help disseminate and/or use your products.

Planning Step 6: Monitoring and Evaluating Communication Efforts

The sixth step of planning a communications effort is to build in mechanisms to help you evaluate the effectiveness of your plan and its activities. As with implementing a CBAE program, you will evaluate the effectiveness of your dissemination effort from a process and outcome standpoint, using quantitative and qualitative tools to help you monitor the implementation of the effort as well as its result.

Monitoring Implementation

Monitoring the implementation of your dissemination effort is a process evaluation activity and begins as soon as you distribute your products. Process evaluation is an ongoing function, whether in a CBAE program or a dissemination effort. It answers the questions *Who*, *What*, *When*, *Where*, and *How*. Therefore, document *Who* received your information (audiences), *What* they received (formats), *When* they received it (date), and *Where* and *How* it was conveyed (channels).

Process evaluation also facilitates effective management. In CBAE programs, it supports the timely and faithful implementation of program services and activities. It also helps identify barriers and corrective action, so that you can refine and strengthen interventions. In dissemination efforts, you can use process evaluation to ensure you are meeting distribution or publication timelines, and identify problems and lessons learned.

What to Monitor Quantitatively

You should monitor and document the following quantitative information through process evaluation:

- Number of materials produced (for example, 1,000 brochures, 500 FAQ sheets, 12 newsletters a year, two train-the-trainer modules, six Op-Ed articles a year)
- Number of materials distributed
- If electronic (e.g., websites, downloaded newsletters and FAQ sheets), the number of non-duplicated web hits or document downloads
- Who received public documents, by audience type: primary users, secondary users, and subset groups
- Distribution locations
- Channels of distribution: media or community, direct mail, electronic transmission, or face to face

Keep a log sheet tracking this information. If properly designed, the log sheet can serve multiple purposes. For example, if you documented the number of brochures printed as well as the amount distributed, then you would know how much remained in inventory. Tracking inventory enables you to effectively manage distribution and meet upcoming timelines. Also, inventory clues you in on the success of your efforts. If the product moves quickly, then perhaps it is meeting the audiences' information needs. However, if it sits on the shelf collecting dust, then maybe you aren't doing enough to distribute your product. Unused inventory could also indicate that your information, in its present form, is not relevant or useful to your intended audience and requires rethinking.

Tracking information also helps you assess the breadth and depth of your dissemination effort. It tells you how many layers deep in the community you have penetrated at a systems level—from the individual and family, to schools, service providers, faith communities, public entities, and beyond. In addition, it identifies the regional spread of information, from local to state and Federal.

Determine on your own or with your evaluator the best way to monitor this information. You might use a master log sheet to track all of the public documents you've disseminated or a single tracking sheet for each type of public document. Whichever you choose, the important thing is to track, monitor, and account for the implementation of your dissemination effort.

What to Monitor Qualitatively

Quantitative monitoring provides a hard count assessment of your logistical efforts, the audiences' access to your information, and the depth and breadth of audience penetration. It also provides insight into potential barriers and corrective action. Qualitative monitoring serves a feedback function and helps you contextually understand the process as well as its results. Consider qualitatively monitoring the following:

- Requests for additional materials
- Criticism or concern about the content of your message or audience access
- Suggestions for developing new materials and information
- Responses to presentations using participant feedback forms
- Opportunities to revamp or refine dissemination efforts

In addition to tracking requests and commentary, maintain a portfolio of dissemination products. The portfolio documents your efforts and serves as a qualitative indicator of the chronology and progression of effectiveness in achieving dissemination goals.

You can track qualitative information, the same way as quantitative, using a caller log sheet, for example. However, rather than recording numbers or describing audience demographics, document dates of calls or feedback, audiences represented, products discussed, and a summary of comments. Taken together, this information gives you a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses of your dissemination effort as well as identifies potential avenues for expansion.

Evaluating Dissemination Goals

To evaluate the effectiveness of reaching dissemination goals, incorporate some of your process findings. Process and outcome evaluation work hand in hand. It is important to assess outcome expectations; however, if you did not follow the communications plan or reach intended audiences, chances are you will not meet dissemination goals. Remember, process evaluation helps explain the *Who, What, When, Where, and How* of the dissemination effort; outcome evaluation answers the question *With What Result?* Combined, these two evaluation elements help you understand what worked and what didn't.

The outcome evaluation should answer questions related to dissemination goals, in the context of the audiences reached (type and demographics):

- Based on audience response and reaction, did the message evidence meaningfulness and utility?
- Did audience response and reaction indicate positive results?
 - Positive changes in public opinion or policies
 - Increased understanding of abstinence until marriage programs
 - Support for abstinence programs or abstinence messages to teens
 - Expansion of resiliency programs and activities for adolescents
 - Increased requests for service and technical assistance
 - Development of new educational materials and curriculum
 - Transference of skills and methods to other professionals
 - Increased organizational donations or expansion of voluntarism

What to Measure Quantitatively

As with CBAE grants, outcome evaluation measures consist of published indicators and survey data:

- Audience Satisfaction Surveys (community or conference presentations)
- Pre/post training surveys (train-the-trainer modules)
- Financial and organizational records (donations and volunteers)
- Pre and post dissemination, number of community programs and services (abstinence until marriage, youth resiliency)

- Pre and post dissemination, percentage increase in constituent requests for agency services (abstinence program, information and referral, counseling and mentoring)
- Increased parent participation (in youth activities or program events)

Certain outcomes may not become evident for many years. Also, long-term effects usually require more than one approach; a dissemination effort alone may not be enough to influence community health indicators, such as teen pregnancy or STD rates. However, if a dissemination piece specifically targeted indicators like these over a long period of time and with deep and wide penetration of audiences, a change might be noticeable. Don't assume your efforts will influence indicators—but don't assume they won't. Monitor indicators and use them as outcome measures, if appropriate.

What to Measure Qualitatively

Certain outcome results can only be documented using qualitative information:

- Published state or school-board-generated policies requiring abstinence until marriage education as part of health curricula
- Complimentary letters or testimonials from constituents, parents, schools, or grant partners
- Published feature articles about your program or organizational efforts
- Minutes of partner meetings demonstrating a willingness to incorporate abstinence until marriage messages as part of complementary youth programs and services
- Published responses to Letters to the Editor or Op-Ed pieces (pro and con)
- Partner or service provider strategic plans addressing youth resiliency building

Continuing the Dissemination Process

Once you complete the process and outcome assessment of your dissemination effort, catch your breath and look over your accomplishments! You deserve to celebrate the results—those reflecting success as well as those suggesting lessons learned.

The next step in the dissemination process is to take lessons learned, examine your strengths, improve identified shortcomings—and advance and expand

your next dissemination effort. Remember, health communication is a reciprocal process, one that you learn from and improve upon. Take the time to revisit what worked and what didn't. Modify or improve strategies, and feel confident that you are now able to market your programs and organization effectively by translating evaluation results into public documents. You have much to offer your peers, partners, and constituents. Keep up the good work!

Appendix A: Health Communication Program Cycle

It is worthwhile knowing about each of the Health Communication Program Cycle stages: while these stages enumerate sequentially, they are nonetheless reciprocal. Some of the planning work you do in Stage 1 actually implements in Stages 2, 3, and 4. Also, information you gather or problems you identify in later stages may cause you to adjust and re-plan Stage 1 efforts. As you read the synopsis of the four stages, note the interplay and reciprocal nature of each.

Stage 1: Planning and Strategy Development

In the first stage, you develop a plan and the strategies necessary to implement a successful dissemination effort. During this stage, you will

- Identify and prioritize the evaluation results you will share
- Identify and select target audiences
- Select appropriate formats and channels
- Develop measures and methods to pretest materials and messages
- Develop measures and methods to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your communications plan/dissemination effort

Stage 2: Developing and Pretesting Concepts, Messages, and Materials

In the second stage, you construct the messages you will send, using valid evaluation results, and pretest with sample audiences the messages, formats, and channels you selected during Stage 1. Pretesting messages, formats, and channels

- Ensures you are using, not wasting, organizational resources, time, and talent
- Validates whether the message you are sending has meaning and utility to your intended audiences
- Verifies that the audience understands your message,

has access to planned formats and channels, and accepts the information as matching their culture, beliefs, and normative expectations

Stage 3: Implementing the Program

In Stage 3, you implement dissemination activities and monitor the process. For example, you might track the number of brochures you delivered to various locations in the community, number of individuals who attended a conference presentation or training, and channels used to distribute products. Stage 3 activities help you identify the

- Audiences who received your information
- Breadth and depth of the dissemination effort
- Opportunities to expand the message
- Additional informational needs among audience members
- Opportunities to improve future dissemination activities

Stage 4: Assessing Effectiveness and Making Refinements

In the fourth stage, you evaluate the effectiveness of your dissemination effort with respect to the communications plan, your activities, audience response and reaction, and achievement of your overall communication goals. Examples of the questions you might want answered in Stage 4 are

- Which products generated the greatest response from various audiences?
- What venues best served dissemination efforts?
- What responses did the effort receive and how did they result in increased opportunities for your organization, your program, the CBAE national initiative, or abstinence education in general?
- Did the dissemination effort result in achieving the broader goals you envisioned when you began the communications planning process?

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