

Best Practices for Effective Communication with Stakeholders



Effective communication with stakeholders is crucial for the advancement of the CalFresh Healthy Living program. It allows Local Health Departments (LHDs) to connect with new and existing partners, interface with decision-makers, showcase their impactful programming, and so much more. By understanding our audience and tailoring our communications materials based on best practices, we create opportunities for our audiences to meaningfully engage with the information presented.

This resource provides tips and best practices for **five key components** of tailoring materials for different stakeholders:



Understanding your audience



Choosing your communication method: how and how much to share



Crafting your message for impact



Using the elements of color, graphics, and formatting to convey your message



Selecting the best messengers



Understanding your Audience

We need to understand our audience and their needs to effectively communicate our points and inform their decision making. Develop an audience profile by considering the following:

1

Identify who your intended audience is.

Who plays an important role in the successful implementation, maintenance, and sustainability of your program?

2

Identify what information your intended audience expects, and/or what information they will need to inform their decisions.

What are your audience's interests and how do these connect to your program/initiative?

3

Consider your audience's values and beliefs (these include societal, political, spiritual, cultural, and familial).

How might you frame your information to align with certain values or avoid eliciting a negative reaction?

4

Consider your audience's context.

What are the historical, cultural, and political contexts of your audience?

5

Identify how your audience tends to both receive and share information.

Who do they go to for information and who do they seem to trust (e.g., news organizations, websites, etc.)?

6

Determine numeracy levels.

Does your audience need to know statistical details like effect size or margin of error to have confidence in your findings, or is your audience more focused on practical significance?

7

Consider your audience's literacy levels.

As a general rule, write at a 5th grade reading level or lower. Calculate text readability here: [Readability Scoring System \(readabilityformulas.com\)](http://Readability_Scoring_System(readabilityformulas.com))

8

Consider expertise levels.

What is your audience's existing knowledge of the topic?



Choosing your communication method: how and how much to share

Consider how best to facilitate meaningful engagement with your audience...

Identify your audience's interests and how much time they have

It is important to be intentional in how much information we include in our communications. If we include too much, we risk our audience losing interest or not even reading or listening to our messages at all.



When you tailor your messages to align with both your intended audience's interests and how much time they have, your audience will be more likely to engage with your message in the ways you intend.

Consider your relationship with the audience

The relationship you have with your audience can impact the level of detail needed for your communications to be perceived as credible. Do you have an established trusting relationship with your audience?



If your audience is **already familiar** with your program and/or has an **existing relationship** with you, you may be able to provide less detail without them questioning the information being shared.

If you are communicating with a **new audience**, you may need to opt for more information to illustrate that you are a credible source.

Consider your methods of communication

Tailor the amount of information you include to align with the communication method you use.

Written

(e.g., infographic, report, etc.)

Explicit details and contextual information are necessary in order for a resource to stand alone. See p36 of the [SNAP-Ed PSE Initiative Data Toolkit](#) for pros/cons of various written communication types.

Live Oral

(e.g., presentation)

Slides need not include all contextual details, as the presenter can verbalize further, and audience members can ask clarifying questions as needed.

Video

(e.g., instructional video, success story, spotlight)

Visual and auditory elements can convey a mix of explicit details and contextual storytelling. Consider using visuals, text overlays, and narration to enhance understanding and engagement.

Keep in mind, **leveraging multiple methods of communication is often most effective and inclusive** to all audience members (due to differences in learning styles, for example). Consider the following examples of multi-modal engagement strategies:



Example 1

Goal: Your LHD team wants to meaningfully **engage the community** to help in planning and evaluating your program.

Strategy:

- 1.** Your team hosts a data party and invites diverse stakeholders to collaboratively interpret data and provide input on recommendations
- 2.** To advertise this event, your team utilizes community bulletins, social media posts, and signs/flyers in settings frequented by the priority audience
- 3.** During the session, various approaches are used to share the data in accessible and engaging ways, such as posters or data placemats. Facilitators guide discussions to elicit reactions, interpretations, and ideas for action.
- 4.** By combining these methods, a data party caters to different learning styles and preferences, ensuring that participants can engage with the information presented in multiple ways. [Learn more about hosting a data party.](#)



Example 2

Goal: Your LHD team wants to **inform policy conversations.**

Strategy:

- 1.** While lobbying (i.e., an activity meant to influence federal, state, or local officials to pass or sign legislation or influence the outcomes of an election, referendum, or initiative) is prohibited, **your team can engage with and educate policymakers** about the issues in your community and the role and successes of your program!
- 2.** Your team considers a number of options, such as: scheduling appointments with legislators to introduce yourself and let them know for what issues you can serve as a subject matter expert, inviting them for site visits to see your program in action, and sharing success stories and media featuring your program.
- 3.** Ultimately, your team opts to collaborate with existing partners (community members and community-based organizations) who do not face the same barriers around advocacy. Your team supports these stakeholders ahead of their public comment by helping prepare a one-page fact sheet and succinct talking points.



Crafting your message for impact

What do you want your audience to know and why should they care?

So What?

Determine the intended outcome of your communication—are you presenting a call to action, the solution to a problem? Ensure that your 'so what' is clear to your audience.

Identify what supporting information is most relevant to your audience

What forms of information does your audience tend to trust most: qualitative, quantitative, or both?



If your audience is more likely to buy-in to your message if you include **quantitative data**, which specific data points are most relevant to them/connect to their interests?

If your audience tends to trust **qualitative data**, how can you create space for program participants to tell their story (e.g., incorporating quotes, ethical storytelling, photovoice, etc.). See [FY 2024 SNAP-Ed Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change Initiative Data Toolkit \(usda.gov\)](#) for descriptions of various data collection methods.

Frame your message so it resonates with your audience

Apply your knowledge of **who your audience is, who they trust and their values** to frame your messages for high impact.



Example: If your audience values tradition and community and trusts small businesses, focus your campaign/communication on the impacts selling more produce has on small businesses or local agriculture as opposed to taking a health or food security focus.

Use **asset-based framing**, which defines people and communities by their aspirations and contributions rather than their problems.

Focus on the strengths and agency of the community and frame your program as a collaborator instead of a "savior".



Use destigmatizing language: avoid using terms such as vulnerable or marginalized; instead, try to reference causal factors, such as under-resourced communities or groups that have been [economically/socially] marginalized.



Use person-first language (e.g., a person with diabetes), unless an individual or group expresses preference for identity-first language (e.g., a diabetic).



Check out the training [Asset Framing to Promote Equity and Inclusion](#).

Use engaging and positive language



Using the pronoun "you" helps audiences feel like you are speaking directly to them. This can help audience members see themselves in the information you are presenting and understand any responsibilities you may be communicating.



Use positive language to focus on what can be done: highlight positive outcomes and actions, and suggest possibilities, choices and alternatives

Emotionally connect your audience to your message



We remember information better when we attach an emotion to it; connect your audience to your message through strategic use of tone and mood (consider word choice, graphics used, etc.).



Highlighting case studies and specific stories can be a powerful way to garner buy-in with your audience. If doing so, make sure to also connect your story to the larger issue at hand.

Motivating your audience for action

Monroe's Motivated Sequence is a formula you can use to help guide the organization of your message to increase its level of persuasiveness.

The formula consists of five key steps aimed at helping you achieve your goal of getting your audience to take action.

1. Attention: Get the audience to listen

Use attention-grabbing techniques to draw your audience in

Examples: pose a question, engage the imagination, peak curiosity, pull heartstrings, pay a compliment, etc.

Check out the training [Breakthrough Messaging](#) for tips

2. Need: Get the audience to feel a need/want

Paint a clear picture of the issue that you are aiming to solve

3. Satisfaction: Tell the audience how to fill the need/want

Offer details about the solution and be sure to share how you have considered & addressed barriers

4. Solution: Help your audience see the benefits of what you are presenting

What benefits will be most meaningful to your audience? How will they feel after implementation?

5. Action: Inspire your audience to take action

Be direct - tell your audience what they need to do and provide them with the information and tools to take action



Using the elements of color, graphics, and formatting to convey your message

Accessibility



All communications should comply with [section 508 accessibility](#) regulations and follow the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Accessibility Standards.

Most content should be written at a 5th grade reading level or lower; jargon, technical terms, and abbreviations should be used only when they align with your audience's expertise levels. Check out the Plain Language Action and Information Network's (2011) list of suggested substitutes for complex words: [Use simple words and phrases \(plainlanguage.gov\)](#).

Color and Font

Color grabs attention – it calls on emotions, helps people make connections in our data, navigate our work, and can make what we are presenting more memorable.



Maintain the [CFHL visual brand identity](#) by utilizing Raleway or Arial font, and the CFHL color palette.

Use different brand colors to group sections or topics to help the audience recognize when there is a transition.

Use **color** to make certain text or data points stand out.



Set up a **custom color theme** so CFHL brand colors are easy to apply.

- [Instructions for Microsoft Word and PowerPoint](#)
- [Instructions for Canva](#)

Format

Arrange information so that it aligns with the way people's eyes naturally travel (top to bottom and left to right)



Group like or related items together, leaving enough white space around those items to communicate that the items are a part of the same group

Use headers to organize information according to your audience's priorities



Question headings are useful when you know the questions your audience will likely ask (e.g., 'What is CalFresh Healthy Living?'). This format makes it easier for your audience to quickly find the information they need.

Topic headings are the most formal; however, these headings can tend to be vague to the point that they are unhelpful (e.g. 'Background').

Statement headings are ideal because of how specific they are (e.g. 'Partnerships and Coalitions strengthen CFHL efforts').

Photos

When possible, **use photos of your program**. If this is not an option, use stock photos provided by your organization, or from CFHL-recommended stock photo sites to ensure photos are high quality and align with the CFHL brand.

Graphs

When opting to use graphs or charts, **ensure the type you select is the best fit** for visualizing your data's story and that it aligns with your audience's needs.



Tip: When making your selection, keep in mind that humans find it easier to interpret length as opposed to angle, and that 3-D graphs are especially hard to interpret. It is best to reserve pie charts for when we only have two pieces of data we want to compare.

Ensuring our visualizations **align with the numeracy levels of our audiences** can help increase their accessibility. The following techniques can help increase accessibility.

1

When including percentages, round to the nearest whole number (42% vs 42.38%).

2

When including fractions, use them in a sentence (e.g., 1 in 3 instead of $1/3$).

Every graph or chart should have a **clear purpose**. Consider highlighting a single data point so that it really stands out.



Tip: You can make data points stand out by using a brand color for the data point you want to highlight, and using a grey for the other data points. You can also use descriptive titles to reflect key insights (e.g. "Program participants reported increased fruit consumption from pre- to post-intervention" vs. "Self-reported fruit consumption pre- and post-intervention").

Be intentional in what information you choose to visualize – visualizations should be used to highlight data that needs attention. If there are too many graphics of "unimportant information" then it will "dilute the power" of your visualizations.

Remove unnecessary elements that do not assist your audiences' understanding of the data, such as gridlines, borders, tick marks, etc.

RESOURCES



Find CFHL-recommended stock photos:

[Photo Gallery | SNAP-Ed \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/photo-gallery)

[ARS Image Gallery: USDA ARS](https://www.ars.usda.gov)



Identify the best graph or chart to use:

[The Data Visualization Catalogue \(datavizcatalogue.com\)](https://datavizcatalogue.com)

[Graphing Qualitative Data \(stephanieevergreen.com\)](https://stephanieevergreen.com)

[40+ Great Graphs You Can Make in Microsoft Excel | Depict Data Studio Charts | Depict Data Studio](#)



Learn how to lower numeracy levels:

[\(2003\) Lower the Numeracy Level \(Dataviz Accessibility Quick Wins\) - YouTube](#)



Selecting the Best Messengers

Selecting an appropriate messenger is essential to ensuring your message is effective at reaching your intended audience. Any CFHL stakeholders may be engaged as messengers, including program implementers, community partners, and program participants.

Identify the best fit messengers to deliver your message

Consider the following when working to identify who is best for delivering your message:



- Who is the **authority** on the topic?
- Who does the audience **trust and respect**?
- Who can make an **emotional connection**?
- Who has a **relevant and compelling story**?
- Who is **motivated**?
- Who is **impacted**?

Seek out those with credibility

Those who deliver our messages, whether it's individuals or organizations, must be viewed as credible to be believed

Credibility is derived from the authority, reputation and relevancy of your messages and from the person and organization delivering the messages



Be intentional in your selection

The person you select will be the "face of the story" you are aiming to tell



The person you select should be not only passionate about the content but have a deep understanding of it

Think: "Good stories include characters."

Identify ways you can support the messengers

What can you do if it is determined that someone other than your immediate LHD team is the best fit for a given situation? Your team can take an active role...

Supporting logistics

Creating materials and refining talking points

Building the capacity of the messenger (e.g., training on public speaking or civic engagement)



Check out the resource: [Becoming Better Messengers - Network for Public Health Law \(networkforphl.org\)](https://www.networkforphl.org/)

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