

Communicating with Your Audience During COVID-19

Five Essential Tips

As your organization makes decisions and plans to meet the needs of your community during the Coronavirus (COVID-19), your communications team will need to effectively convey information, resources, and guidance in a thoughtful manner. The following tips are designed to be useful when thinking through the elements of communicating during a crisis.

Be a Connecting Force:

Think about what your audience needs now and fill the void. Don't let them search and sift through the deluge of online information.

Be a one-stop-shop where they can find a number of things by developing a resources and information page on your website. Link to this page from your homepage with a **PROMINENT** link. If a hub already exists elsewhere, promote it and work with it.

Convene an online conversation to bring together community leaders and constituents to answer questions and be a resource.

Communicate with Empathy:

Use values-based language to demonstrate caring (example: your safety and health is our top priority). Acknowledge the challenges people face and what you are doing or will do to support them.

Don't sensationalize. Use straightforward language and imagery: Coronavirus (COVID-19) not pandemic, epidemic, emergency, crisis, worldwide public health emergency, disaster. Use language like "during this time" or "during COVID-19." Steer clear of scary images of microbes.

Manage expectations with transparency: don't say "this will be ok" or "we have no plans to..."

Use trusted resources.

Communicate Early & Often:

Resist the impulse to wait until you know more. Prepare a standby message.

Communicate your caring persistently. Name the problem that the current crisis poses for those you care about. Talk about your approach.

The current situation is fluid. It will change. Continue communicating as the situation unfolds. Your audience's needs will change, and your solutions will develop over time.

Use all your channels as a broader audience may now need the information, resources, and services you offer. Develop new channels that are needed now.

Be responsive to comments and questions.

Designate an editor. Remember you are moving fast.

Remain Forward Looking:

Use system of care values and framework to help you make decisions including where to put resources.

Implement continuous quality improvement strategies to assess how things are going and what is working, where the challenges are, and what you need to change.

Prepare for the next steps. Each step in the process requires attentiveness to what youth and families need in order to address the increased stressors.

Prepare for post-COVID-19 challenges that youth and families will face as they return to school and work.

Be prepared to address the needs of youth and families who have experienced the loss of family, friends, jobs, and face economic uncertainty.

Build Collaboration Between Leaders & Communicators:

Make sure communicators hear about organizational changes firsthand; bring them into leadership meetings where direction is established, and decisions are made during a time of crisis.

Share communications plans and direction with leadership. A unified organizational voice is needed now more than ever.

Involve your social marketing committee and existing communications working groups. Share your plans. Ask for help in disseminating.

Make sure your internal team is aware of external-facing communications and the level of effort required by the team.