



chapter

6

Using Other Communication Strategies and Tactics to Implement the Plan

Media advocacy is not the only effective approach for disseminating your workgroup's key messages among policy makers, partners, and stakeholders. Each time you communicate with primary or secondary audiences is an opportunity to promote your messages and efforts. Public speeches, exhibits, legislative testimony, and various multipurpose communication vehicles, such as written informational materials and the World Wide Web, can be particularly helpful in generating widespread community awareness of and support for policy on cardiovascular health and related environmental change. If your workgroup chooses to use media advocacy as a tool for implementing its communication plan, a range of community outreach tactics can reinforce this effort.

DEVELOPING GENERAL TALKING POINTS

You may wish to develop general talking points as one of your first communication tools. Talking points are a bulleted list of key messages and supporting facts that you can reference when asked to discuss the workgroup's issue. Although you should always tailor your talking points to the specific presentation, media interview, or other planned communication activity you are involved with, it is helpful to have a standard set of talking points you can refer to when responding to unexpected calls and other requests for information from the media, potential partners, and others. Work with members of your workgroup to develop talking points on the issues your communication effort aims to address. The talking points should contain the facts to support your key messages. As you develop talking points, refer to the guidelines on pages 38–39 for developing the key messages. Distribute your talking points to every workgroup member, so they can incorporate them into their individual communication activities and help to ensure that the initiative's messages and supporting information are presented accurately and uniformly.

DELIVERING PRESENTATIONS

Public speaking is an important and highly effective tool for educating communities about important public health issues and garnering their support for related advocacy efforts. Work closely with your workgroup to identify opportunities for speaking directly to policy makers, program decision makers, sources of funding, general consumers, and other audiences you are targeting as potential supporters for CVH policy and environmental change. Reach out to every organization and individual contact that has an interest in heart health throughout your state and local communities to develop a roster of their scheduled conferences, seminars, and other meetings and special events that may afford an opportunity to present your initiative. For example, look for events sponsored by

managed care organizations and recreation and fitness groups. Also seek ways to organize “stand-alone” speaking engagements with these parties.

Create a Framework

As a starting point for developing a presentation on policy and environmental change related to CVH, you must establish an objective. Determine exactly what you want to achieve with the group you will address. It may help to ask yourself, “What are my objectives and why?” “What is the best approach for reaching them?” From your answers, you can develop the core message and supportive talking points that will form the basis of your presentation.

Practice for Perfection

Like anything else, public speaking gets easier with practice. Before delivering a speech or presentation on CVH policy and environmental change, spend time rehearsing your approach. If you do not have much speaking experience, you may want to practice your delivery with small groups of people you already know, such as colleagues at work, family members, and friends. Ask them to provide general feedback and offer tips for improving or enhancing your presentation.

Entertain Questions

Always allow the audience an opportunity to pose questions at the end of your presentation. As you formulate appropriate responses, follow the same instructions that are provided for conducting media interviews. (See *Conducting Media Interviews*, page 49.) Stay focused, keep your message simple, never argue or fight, and never lie. Back your general statements with specific facts



Sample talking points are provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 123.



and figures that are reliable, and do not answer hypothetical questions. Be aware of late-breaking news or current events that may have a bearing on the issue you are presenting. Also be prepared to field questions from individuals who disagree with your position. Do not shy away from answering difficult questions. Focus on the workgroup's key message and supportive talking points. Transitional phrases that can help you respond to tough questions and direct the audience back to your intended focus of discussion include the following:

- “I am not familiar with that, but I can tell you that...”
- “I’m sure that’s true, and another thing I’m sure of is...”
- “I agree with you, and I’m sure you’ll agree that...”
- “Yes, that can wait until tomorrow, but something that cannot wait is...”
- “Your point is well taken, and one other point is...”

TIPS

SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SPEAKING

- **Be prepared.** Learn as much as you can about your audience and what they want to hear or learn. Think through what you are trying to say, and develop the best approach for relating to them.
- **Practice delivering the core message and supportive points.** However, try to avoid sounding overly rehearsed. Commit your key talking points to memory, but do not memorize the entire speech. Your presentation should be natural and responsive to the moment.
- **Incorporate effective visual elements.** Make sure the visuals are large and clear enough to be seen and understood by everyone. Keep in mind that PowerPoint presentations should be visible to people sitting at the back of a room.
- **Grab the audience's attention.** Begin your presentation with an opening statement that will capture immediate interest. This statement should focus on a unique aspect of CVH policy and environmental change, perhaps the most interesting, unusual, or humorous

part of what you have to say. You may want to show a visual aid or share an anecdote or personal experience that directly relates to your listeners and supports your core message. This, along with a quick reference to your credentials, will help you establish credibility.

- **Tell a story.** The words you use to present your CVH issue should paint a picture the listeners will see and remember. Be clear, direct, and avoid going off on tangents. Personalize the presentation whenever possible, and show that you care about what you are saying.
- **Ask for what you want.** A message without a specific request is a wasted opportunity. Use your presentation as a platform to garner support for your workgroup's CVH initiative. Keep in mind that a request for a specific action, within a specific time frame, is more likely to get results.
- **Thank your host.** In closing, thank the audience for its time and be sure to recognize the organization(s) and/or individual(s) who arranged your presentation and provided their support.



Reinforce Presentations With Leave-Behind Materials

At the conclusion of the presentation, distribute handouts that reinforce your key messages. These materials should be tailored to the audience you addressed, providing useful background information about your workgroup, ongoing issues and activities related to CVH health and environmental change, and information about workgroup contacts. If you use PowerPoint or overhead slides for the presentation, you may want to provide each member of the audience with a copy of the presentation.

DEVELOPING EXHIBITS

A well-planned, visually appealing, and user-friendly exhibit can help you disseminate your messages and materials on CVH policy and environmental change to large audiences at conferences, health fairs, community meetings, and other public events. Consult with members of your workgroup to determine which events will offer the greatest display opportunities. Then, assess your collective time and resources for producing an exhibit. To promote your CVH initiative, you may want to “borrow” a member organization’s exhibit framework and design supportive signage and materials, or you may opt to consult with an outside public relations or design firm to customize and produce a new exhibit with existing workgroup resources. Here are general suggestions for planning and designing exhibits that can capture widespread attention, communicate important messages on CVH policy and environmental change, and dispense supportive program materials¹:

- **Determine the target audience(s).** The target audience(s) likely will vary among the venues where you exhibit. Develop the key message and three or four supportive points your exhibit will present to each target audience.
- **Select the most appropriate media for reaching your audience(s).** Exhibits can include multiple types of media, such as print, illustration, photography, film, television, computer, and interactive video.
- **Sketch ideas for making the exhibit visually interesting.** Most viewers spend only a few seconds to a few minutes viewing exhibit information. Determine the key copy and visual elements you will incorporate into the exhibit, and group them together to communicate your key points. Establish the size, shape, and layout that will attract attention to your exhibit.
- **Reinforce the theme of the exhibit with creative headlines.** Create a short, catchy title to identify the exhibit and involve the viewers. Choose a type font that is legible and a contrasting color combination.
- **Make the copy easy to read.** Use large font sizes, short sentences, and simple and direct language. Design your layout to read from left to right and top to bottom.
- **Create strong visual impact by using fewer and larger graphics.** Use words sparingly. Graphics that are too dense or too small will not be read.
- **Be cautious with use of color.** Bright colors detract from visuals and can make copy less legible, but neutral colors can blend into the background.
- **Keep the exhibit simple and uncluttered.** Allow areas of negative space to work for you. It is not necessary to fill the entire exhibit panel. Likewise, overcrowding your exhibit’s countertop with literature and other products can overwhelm hurried viewers and deter them from visiting the booth.
- **Test design ideas.** Consult with others to assess their opinions and reactions to your initial thoughts before proceeding to production of your exhibit. Which designs are most appealing and least complicated? Which designs communicate most effectively?

USING MULTIPURPOSE COMMUNICATION VEHICLES

General informational materials and the World Wide Web are extremely powerful instruments for advocating efforts for CVH policy and environmental change to your target audiences. Look for ways to build these mechanisms into your workgroup's outreach efforts.

Produce Fact Sheets, Pamphlets, and Brochures

Standard written materials, such as fact sheets, pamphlets, and brochures, can help you educate consumers and other key audiences about the need for CVH policy and environmental change, either directly or through multiple dissemination channels. These supportive materials can be promoted by the media, circulated at public speaking engagements and exhibits, and mass distributed by members of your workgroup and other partnering organizations. It is a good idea to have a supply of these materials on hand at all times, so you can provide general background information about the initiative and relevant CVH issues on request. Much of the content for developing these resources can be drawn from the materials you create for the media.

Develop "Drop-in" Articles

A "drop-in" article is a completely prewritten news or feature story that can be published verbatim in state health department publications, organizational newsletters, community magazines, shopping guides, and other local materials that regularly fall into the hands of policy makers, consumers, organizations with an interest in heart health, and other key audiences. It also can be posted to a wide range of news and organizational Web sites reaching these groups.

Develop a series of "drop-in" articles on issues related to CVH policy and environmental change that members of your workgroup and other key program partners can include

in their internal publications and at their organizational Web sites and circulate to external groups. Also approach organizations with related missions to explore their interest in publishing your article. Find out their deadlines for newsletter and Web site submissions, the appropriate person to receive items, and any length or style requirements. Community magazines and shopping guides tend to favor articles tied to current events, but they are not extremely time sensitive. Because many small publications have limited staff and resources, their publishers are eager for material to fill space during slow times. A general article about your local efforts for CVH policy and environmental change can be useful for this purpose.

A sample drop-in article is provided in *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 125.



Work With the Web

With millions of people surfing the World Wide Web each day and the numbers of online users climbing steadily, the Internet is a powerful tool for promoting messages and materials on CVH policy and environmental change. More and more people are turning to the Internet as a key source for news, shopping, entertainment, travel, and communication, particularly as these interests relate to health care. According to philanthropyfoundation.org, nearly 100 million people have access to the Internet and are using it a combined 65 million hours each day. By 2005, the number of users is expected to grow to 1 billion.

Work with your workgroup to leverage this trend by incorporating the Internet into your CVH communication efforts. Consider collaborating on the development of a common Web site that supports your initiative and/or developing promotional materials that can be posted to the Web sites



of partner organizations. Both Web-focused strategies can help you expand the reach of your key messages, mobilize support, and become connected with other CVH advocates. As you and your partners assess the viability of developing a Web site and/or related content, consider your goals for going online. Ask yourselves the following questions:

- What do you hope to achieve? For example, is your goal to disseminate information that simply educates people about your workgroup and an issue related to CVH policy and environmental change? Or, do you want to establish a more interactive presence, where people can engage in activities such as signing petitions, participating in chat rooms, and joining listservs?
- Which audience(s) would you like to reach (e.g., policy makers, health consumers, news media, and/or potential program partners)?
- How much will it cost?
- Who should be involved? Do you have the expertise to develop the Web site internally, or will you need to hire an outside expert?
- Who will be responsible for ongoing maintenance and upkeep? How frequently will you be able to update your site?
- How will you measure your success?

Once you and members of the workgroup have a better sense of what you hope to achieve by going online, you can discuss a variety of ways to put your Internet presence to use. General approaches you can take to advocate CVH policy and environmental change through online mechanisms include the following:

- **Spread the news.** Use your Web site to provide the public with general information about your workgroup and its mission, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Be sure to give thorough explanations of the structure, purpose, and activities of the workgroup, and information for site

visitors on how to contact you. Update the site regularly to keep supporters abreast of the latest news and information resulting from your efforts for CVH policy and environmental change. Make the workgroup's publications, media tools, and other promotional resources available for download. In addition, create a special section for the news media to obtain media-specific information with an e-mail link to your workgroup's designated media liaison.

- **Mobilize CVH forces.** Create a listserv "sign-up" mechanism that allows site visitors to register to receive electronic copies of workgroup newsletters, action alerts, and reminders about events. This function will be especially useful if you plan to promote letter-writing campaigns and other grassroots strategies for reaching key decision makers in support of efforts for policy and environmental change. You can also create a function at your Web site that allows visitors to sign online petitions and send e-mail letters directly to a targeted legislator, regulator, or other key decision maker.
- **Network with like-minded groups and individuals.** Link your workgroup's Web site to the sites of similar initiatives for policy and environmental change and key organizational supporters. The Internet provides a wonderful opportunity for like-minded groups and individuals to learn about each other's activities, exchange useful tools and information, and reinforce efforts toward a common goal. Develop a series of bulletin boards and/or chat rooms where interested site visitors can post messages and engage in online discussion. By encouraging these groups and individuals to link to your site, you will attract greater traffic and build relationships that can yield long-term support for your initiative for CVH policy and environmental change.
- **Recruit additional partners.** Establish a means for prospective supporters to learn

about your effort on their own time and contact you if they are interested in becoming involved. Be sure to promote your Web site address at every public speaking engagement and other community event where you are likely to interact with potential program partners. Likewise, include your Web site address on all of your consumer- and media-focused materials. Interested individuals may want to speak with you directly, submit a written request for more information, or sign up for specific project tasks that suit their interests, directly at your Web site.

Create and Circulate E-Newsletters

Even if your workgroup chooses not to create a Web site, consider using e-mail newsletters to build awareness and support for your issue among target audiences and to keep partners informed of upcoming events, ongoing activities, and success stories. An e-newsletter can be as simple as a listserv you create to send monthly updates and meeting minutes to the members of your coalition. You also can work with partners to identify existing listservs, so you can access the key groups you are trying to reach. For example, you may wish to educate policy makers about issues related to heart disease and stroke by sending a daily digest of relevant online news articles to your state's legislative listserv. Other relevant listservs can be identified through local chapters of health care provider organizations and other professional groups, chambers of commerce, and neighborhood associations. To send a message to a listserv, you likely will need to request special access or work with your partners to submit messages for review by the list's manager.

PROVIDING LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Legislative committees hold hearings to collect comments on bills they are considering and to learn about issues related to the legislation. As experts on the public health implications of heart disease and stroke, you and your

partners have an important role in educating policy makers about the state of health in their communities and the impact that policy interventions can have on health. One way to fulfill this role is to publicly present your position(s) before a committee of legislators.

Work closely with your workgroup to identify the best spokesperson for delivering testimony on a particular measure. If state-level protocols restrict you from providing legislative testimony, you may wish to arrange for a partner to testify. Another possible strategy is to recruit an individual who can present personal and/or family perspectives with supportive data and written materials.

Do Your Committee Homework

Before arriving to deliver your testimony on the day of the committee meeting, take the time to familiarize yourself with the committee by collecting the following information:²

- Committee name and jurisdiction;
- Names of committee members and the districts they represent;
- Rules for testifying (e.g., time limits and the need to provide copies of testimony in advance);
- Names of workgroup members and other partners who reside in districts of committee members; and
- Names of other organizations and individuals who will testify.

It also is a good idea to attend at least one hearing to observe and become familiar with the committee's process. Assess the legislators' key interests and questioning styles and how witnesses behave during their testimony.³ Always adhere as closely as possible to a committee's rules for testifying, including the duration of oral testimony and the paper size, and other format specifications for the printed copy.^{4,5}



In many states, you may be required to call the committee staff (usually the staff of the committee's chair) in advance to let them know you will be testifying. In some cases, this step will register you to be notified if the date and time of the hearing changes.

Prepare the Testimony

In preparing your testimony, strive to achieve a balance between covering all the important points, but not providing so much detail that you lose the committee's attention. A good general rule is to cover only a single topic and to present no more than three key messages during the testimony. Anything

more may detract from your key messages during the few minutes you have to speak. You may want to consider preparing two versions of your testimony: one for the official record, which will be distributed to the full committee, and the other for your oral presentation, which can be shorter and less formal.⁶

To prepare for delivering your testimony, follow the guidelines for successful public speaking (*see chart on Successful Public Speaking on page 63*). Practice your delivery with an audience of colleagues, staff, or friends. Do not read directly from your testimony. Depending on the committee's

TIPS

PRESENTING EFFECTIVE TESTIMONY^{3,4,6}

- **Tell a real-life story.** Legislators respond to human interest stories, not just statistics. Tell the story of your own experience or the experience of a workgroup member or another partner. However, make sure that the connection between your story and the legislative initiative is clear. For example, "This story demonstrates the importance of statewide 9-1-1 coverage. Without 9-1-1, my mother never would have received timely treatment for her stroke."
- **Avoid jargon.** Committee members are likely to have varying degrees of knowledge about the issues related to the legislative measure, including none at all. Avoiding medical or other jargon will help to sustain their attention. Keep it simple.
- **Be constructive and reasonable.** Build your credibility by presenting an honest and fair assessment of the impact the measure would have on personal health or community health. Never denounce an issue or other organization's testimony.
- **Stay nonpartisan and do not get ruffled.** Maintaining a calm and professional manner regardless of a legislator's behavior will build your credibility. Never show anger or argue with a committee member.
- **Mention whether you are a constituent.** If you are a constituent, your committee member is likely to have a greater interest in hearing what you have to say.
- **Be ready to make adjustments.** A bill's sponsor may offer amendments when presenting the bill to the committee that could change your position on the measure. Be sure to adjust your remarks as necessary to reflect these changes.
- **Do not be afraid to say "I don't know, but I'll get back to you."** Answer a question only if you are certain of the answer. If you try to wing it and make a mistake, your credibility will be lost. If you cannot provide an immediate answer, let the committee know you would like to get back to them. Then follow up as soon as possible.
- **Be prompt with follow-up.** Send a timely thank-you note highlighting your key points and offering any additional information requested.

rules, you may have as little as three minutes to speak, so summarize your key messages and supporting points and rely on your written testimony to provide greater explanation and backup data. Be sure to allow enough time for questions from the legislators. Collaborate with your workgroup to brainstorm questions you might be asked and develop appropriate answers. Then, rehearse your answers until they are concise and to the point. In formulating the answers, refer to the guidelines for answering questions during media interviews (see pages 49–52).

Get the “Day-of” Details

Find out when the committee will consider your measure or issue of interest and where the hearing will be held. In addition, check

the agenda when you arrive at the meeting room, because legislative schedules can change at the last minute. Procedures vary from state to state, but individuals offering testimony generally are asked to sign in when they arrive and state whether they oppose, support, or are neutral toward the measure being considered. You may be asked to provide copies of your written testimony at this time. This copy should contain a cover page on letterhead that clearly indicates your personal contact information and the contact information for the workgroup or organization you represent.^{4,6,7}

Tailor your delivery to the conventions of the committee, but keep in mind that individuals providing legislative testimony generally address the chairperson first and

STATE POLICY MAKERS’ COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY OF STATE POLICY MAKERS⁷

Researchers from the Center for Studying Health System Change conducted telephone interviews with 292 state government policy makers and assessed trusted sources of and preferences for receiving health policy information. Key findings include the following:

- State agencies and organizations of government professionals were listed as key, trusted sources of information. Also listed were state groups, such as medical societies and hospital associations (21 percent), foundations (21 percent), think tanks (14 percent), and universities (6 percent).
- When asked what makes research relevant to them, 67 percent of policy makers identified the information’s relevance to current debates and 25 percent cited impact on “real” people.
- Legislators and staff overwhelmingly prefer to receive information in brief, one- or two-page fact sheets, rather than receiving comprehensive reports. They reported being more likely to read information that is short, broken into bullets, and accompanied by charts or graphs illustrating key points.
- Younger policy makers and legislative staff are more receptive than are older legislators to electronic sources of information, such as Web sites.
- Legislative staff expressed a greater interest than the legislators in receiving in-depth information. They want information that enables them to assess the accuracy and credibility of the information they receive, and fully explore the methodology and limitations of research. But at the same time, they want the information to be short. When you are making policy recommendations, one good approach is to provide both a summary for briefing legislators and the full report for staffers to review.

then the members of the committee, saying, “Mister Chairman (or Madam Chair), members of the committee...” You may be asked to state information for the record, such as your name, address, and the organization you represent. When you finish your presentation, thank the committee members for the opportunity to testify and offer to answer any questions. When a member asks a question, respond, “Mister Chairman (or Madam Chair), Senator/ Representative [last name]...” then proceed to answer the question.

Do not be surprised if legislators appear to be ignoring your presentation, or if they leave while you are talking. It is their decision whether or not to listen to you, and their reasons for not paying attention may have nothing to do with the legislation you are discussing. Legislators often have overlapping commitments, including presenting bills in other committees at the same time. Just remain calm and continue your delivery. In the words of one writer, “you’re playing on their turf and they set the rules.”⁸ If you are interrupted, just go with the flow and maintain a professional manner, but never interrupt a committee member.^{9,10}

COMMENTING ON LEGISLATION

As a member of a state agency, you may be asked to provide written or oral comments on a piece of legislation during the formal comment period. Providing comments on a measure is an opportunity to discuss its potential impacts and to suggest any modifications that address the concerns of the bill’s sponsor(s). States often compile comments for the official record and distribute this document to the full committee. To provide oral comments on a piece of legislation, follow the guidelines for providing legislative testimony explained in the previous section. If you will be making written comments, check with the appropriate committee to learn their rules for

commenting, including the time limit for oral testimony, standard format for printed copy, and procedures for submission. Often, you will be asked to send your comments to the committee chair.

EVALUATING YOUR COMMUNICATION EFFORTS

As previously mentioned, it is important for you and members of your workgroup to continuously assess the status and effectiveness of your execution of the communication initiative and the outcomes achieved both during and after implementation. (*See Chapter 4 for guidance on evaluating communication activities.*)