

Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities

Phase six- Communication and Dissemination

[Karma Harris] Hello everyone! My name is Karma Harris, and I'm a public health consultant with the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, also known as NACDD for short. I've had the privilege over the last few years of leading and managing the Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities project, which is a project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

This project really builds upon a previous Healthy Communities model used by NACDD and was modified to consist of six phases that really are a crucial part of the inclusive healthy community change process that are focused on improving the health and well-being of people with disabilities. These phases are: Phase one is the Commitment phase, phase two is the Assessment and Training phase, phase three is the Prioritization and Planning phase, phase four is Implementation, phase five is Evaluation, and phase six is Communication and Dissemination.

Today's session we will be discussing Phase Six of our model, which involves performing communication and dissemination activities to share project successes and lessons learned very broadly with multiple audiences. So, with us today to help us in this conversation is our Iowa State Expert Advisor, Ms. Maggie Ferguson, who's going to talk with us about some of the communication and dissemination activities that she did in her state, as well as her community groups implemented during the project, really, specifically, giving us Iowa perspective here.

And then I'll also introduce our listeners to Ms. Allison Tubbs, who is a seasoned inclusive communications specialist with our project partners at the National Center for Health Physical Activity and Disability, or NCHPAD for short. I want us to begin our conversation with Maggie. Maggie, will you talk to us a little bit about your two Iowa communities, because we have heard a little bit about the previous eight communities, and want our listeners to understand who we worked with in the state of Iowa.

[Maggie Ferguson] Sure, thanks. We had two different communities that we worked with. First there was Carroll County, and the other was Sioux City. So, the community of Carroll County is located in a rural western Iowa. And just to give you an idea of how rural that area is, their county seat, which is the city of Carroll, has a population of right around 10,000 people. For that community, the disability population that they chose to work with really focused on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The partners that were working on the project there included a disability service organization called Healthcare Options, and they were also engaged with the local health department and the local fitness facility, called Platinum Fitness. So, Carroll County has achieved some policy, systems, and environmental improvements, such as developing raised garden beds. They constructed an all-abilities playground and they've also had inclusive physical activities throughout the policy and system level

changes implemented by the Home Care Options and Platinum Fitness. And they also worked with the Medicaid managed care organization that supports the clients in their community.

In Sioux City, that's located in northwestern corner of the state. It's right on the edge of Iowa bordered by South Dakota and Nebraska. They have a population of approximately 82,000 people. So, a little bit bigger than the Carroll community that we're working with. So, we considered them to be our urban setting.

That group focused really on improving the access and various opportunities that people with disabilities could have to increase their physical activity, without necessarily limiting their focus by homing in on a specific type of disability. Their policy, systems, and environmental improvements included development of an adaptive indoor rock-climbing wall. They had outdoor winter sledding developed that was adapted, as well.

They also improved accessibility access and recreational opportunities at the local parks. So really partnered in the local parks and recs to make improvements, not only to outdoor farmer's markets, but also the built environments. So, creating crosswalks with curb cuts and increasing the number of accessible parking spaces that were adjacent to those settings.

[Karma Harris] Allison, in terms of, before really diving in on the communication dissemination pieces, will you tell us a little bit about your specific role with NCHPAD? Just to give our listeners some background on this project because I've talked a lot about NCHPAD and their role with us and their role in the project, but this is the first time we've heard from someone at NCHPAD. So, I want to just give you a chance to talk a little bit about that and your role.

[Allison Tubbs] Absolutely. So, thank you so much, Karma, for having me on today. So, I'm really excited to share about this work with the listeners and the importance of inclusive communication.

So, I work as the senior Project Coordinator with NCHPAD, and we're a federally funded National Center on Disability. We're also a health promotion resource and practice center of the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, which is housed at CDC. So, our work as a national center is really focused on building inclusive healthy communities where all people have equal access and opportunities for healthy living. And we do this in a variety of different ways. But mostly focused on providing resources and information to individuals.

We look at promoting community and environmental changes. We also look at accelerating research to practice. And then lastly, focusing a national attention on the urgent need for disability inclusion. So, at NCHPAD, we've been doing this work for over 20 years now. We implement a comprehensive, inclusive, health promotion agenda that's really building capacity and accelerating impact, and what we call community health inclusion.

[Karma Harris] It might benefit our listeners just tell us a little bit more about your specific role to this project, and sort of hone down on kind of what your involvement was, and all the great stuff that you did for us.

[Allison Tubbs] Yes. So just want to say I've thoroughly enjoyed my time working with this project. It's really been a great group of state and community leaders who are really making changes an impact for people with disabilities in their community. But specifically, as a project partner, NCHPAD, we were pleased to host an initial training summit for the chosen states at our headquartered location of Lakeshore Foundation, which is in Birmingham, Alabama.

So, at this training, we were able to share with project teams who NCHPAD is, and what we offer, also that we are available for training and technical assistance, mainly focusing in the areas of healthy eating and physical activity and general disability accessibility. Also, throughout the project we provided different informational resources and training to the project teams, kind of on an as-needed basis. We utilized our team of expert inclusion specialists which is subject matter experts on disability and inclusion, that are part of the NCHPAD team, and made sure that the project teams were aware of any new resources and trainings and information that NCHPAD had developed throughout the project period, that they could also utilize in their states and communities.

So, another specific example of our role in the project is we were able to utilize our in-house videographer team to go out and travel to each of the states to really capture project stories and interviews, and they created a video success story for each project team. We thought that was a really cool way to showcase successes and to visualize the projects that are happening on-the-ground in communities. So really, we provided just kind of general dissemination and communication support, whether that was through posting project related stories on our website through social media channels or newsletters; anything that we can do to help share and uplift the successes and inclusion wins that are a result of this project.

And then the last thing that I'll mention is myself. I was able to give a training webinar on effective communication and dissemination for inclusive health and we focused on how to use social marketing strategies for inclusive health messaging, as well as just general inclusive communication tips. So, I was really excited about that role in the project because those are definitely passion topics of mine. That was great to be able to provide that training and then engage in dialogue with the project team.

[Karma Harris] I'll kind of start by saying that during the last couple of years we've worked really hard with the state and community partners of the project and the CDC to implement a variety of communication dissemination activities, so that we can be intentional about really broadly sharing and disseminating the great work that the communities are doing, but also the great work at the state, and the benefit on the national level for NACDD and NCHPAD. I think we've done a really good job at getting some of these successes and project lessons learned out there.

So for example, some of the activities that we've done, Alison's already mentioned some of them, but we've done written and video success stories; we have done written testimonials; we've done...some

of our grantees have done print and TV and radio, which is traditional media; all of them have done some type of social media and social marketing; there have been a number of large group and conference presentations that really spanned each the local, regional, state, and national level. So, we're doing as much as we can collectively, as a big project group, to really get this information and the good news about this project out.

One of the things that I'll talk a little bit about is a four-part communication webinar series. We felt, in order for the state and community project participants to do this work effectively, we needed to provide them with some training. And one of the avenues that we did with NCHPAD was we implemented a joint four-part communication webinar series about a year ago to prep them and teach them about these different activities and give them the skills to implement these activities.

And so that four-part webinar series really covered traditional and non-traditional media, how to work with them, what are some key tips, how to write effective success stories, and then how to use social media platforms and integrate proper inclusive social marketing techniques, and we were really excited to partner with NCHPAD and doing that. Maggie, can you talk to us and describe some of these activities that you did to communicate and disseminate this project information at the state level, and also touch on some of the activities that you know your local communities implemented, and any tidbits you'd like to share about that?

[Maggie Ferguson] Probably one of the primary ways that we were able to get the messaging out was getting in front of large groups of people at statewide conferences, so providing presentations. I would be a part of the panel for a presentation and provide the statewide overview of various strategies that can be implemented. And then also tying it back to the state health department's strategic plan focusing on obesity, physical activity, and nutrition.

So, making that connection, and being able to piggyback the statewide message, and then also a part of that panel would be someone from the local community sharing information about how they are implementing strategies in their community around the policy, systems, and environmental changes as part of this project. And we also had a local organization provide information, as well as how the project impacted their individual clients. So, giving that multi-level perspective.

And then in terms of the local communities, both communities completed two written success stories, each highlighting a project success that they had experienced. They also submitted a couple of written testimonies of individuals or organizations in their communities that were positively influenced in some manner as a result of the project's efforts to create inclusive and healthy community changes.

Both communities have additionally used traditional media to share their project successes, such as print or video and radio events. And both communities have participated in social media messaging, which we can talk about a little further on in this podcast.

[Karma Harris] Great. Allison, what would you recommend, in terms of activities, that people who haven't been part of the project can do on their own, and how do we know if we're doing messages in the right way?

[Allison Tubbs] Absolutely. So, before you start utilizing communication dissemination, coming up with your messaging, you really need to base it off many factors of the project and really figure out what you're trying to communicate about. So, you want to look at what your message is and that you're trying to send, and who you're trying to send the message to. So, one of the reasons that we see, that there are many different social media platforms that are emerging, is that they all really have a specific and different purpose, and that they all resonate with different types of people.

So if you take a step back at your project and you really come up with a communication and social media plan that clearly defines and outlines what message you're trying to send, what the goal of your messages is, and who you're trying to reach with your messages, it will really help you find and utilize the right platforms to be able to disseminate those messages out.

So also, with social media, you have the ability to have a direct connection to people, and in order to ensure that you're really building and creating messages that are being utilized, you have to use social media and communication to promote the work that you're doing. So also with social media, like I mentioned, you have that opportunity to build relationships with people, but you want to make sure that your messaging, and what you're putting out is reflected in an authentic way, so that if you're doing it correctly, it will spread to others and people will build a relationship back with you and be able to understand your message and utilize it in their everyday practices and work.

[Karma Harris] I really like a couple of the things that you just mentioned, Allison. One is the communication plan.

I think we really talk about developing a community action plan for implementing the policies, systems, and environmental change approaches. But when you reach the point where you're having successes, then it's time to share and really disseminate the good work that you're doing, I do think it's important to think about developing a communication plan specifically. And the one thing I tell people is imagine it like it's an action plan that helps you talk about your successes, and there's a lot of different activities that you can integrate.

And so, I was really glad to hear you mention that. And then the other thing I was really glad to hear you talk more about is the fact that each of the social media platforms really has a different target group that it's trying to reach. And so, when you think about how to launch social media campaigns, or maybe where to start, it might be daunting for a lot of people. And so, could you expand on that just a little bit more and tell us which of the many social media platforms that you recommend for communicating inclusive healthy community messages, like those with this project?

[Allison Tubbs] Absolutely. So first off like you mentioned, very important to have a plan. A lot of people think social media is just posting pictures, posting information. It's just kind of on the whim, on the fly, but especially when you're utilizing social media in business, you have to have that plan. You have to have messages built out and you have to have a whole framework around it, and a team to support. So, thank you for reiterating that.

But as far as platforms are concerned, there's really three main platforms that I recommend using in business when you're using social media and to be able to get your healthy community messages out to the world. And so those three platforms are – that you probably already heard of – Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. So, diving a little bit deeper, Facebook is super popular. It's still considered the world's most popular platform. It has almost 1 billion people utilizing it worldwide.

So, when utilizing Facebook for business, the best thing to do is to first create what's called a business page. And what this will do, it allows you to be able to get access to Facebook's free analytic tools. They're already built into the platform. And when you use these analytic tools, you'll be able to tell how many people you are really reaching with your messages.

So, then the next one that I recommend is Twitter. So, Twitter is a microblog site and it really serves as an open forum. You have access to nearly anyone in anywhere, and it's predominantly a public space. Very few people have private Twitter accounts, whereas you might see more people who are using Facebook for personal use – have private accounts where you have to request friend access, and whatnot. That's not necessarily the case on Twitter. So, you have more accessibility to more types of people.

So, Twitter messages are short: they're only 280 characters. And with Twitter, it allows you to use what's called a hashtag. And this is a number sign, which is now called “hashtag” followed by a phrase, or a theme. And what this does is allows you to theme your messages, and to be able to track those themes and trends, and to also tap your messages into larger themes that you want people who are following those trends to be able to see the messages that you're putting out.

So, when you're using Twitter, you want to make sure that you're being intentional because you do have that limited character space of only 280 characters, and you do have limitations as far as hashtags. So, we don't really want to see 10 different hashtags on one post. Kind of a common rule is one to three maximum number of hashtags. We don't want to diminish the value of our messages, and make sure that we're really communicating what we want people to read.

So, then the last platform is Instagram and this one is still fairly new to the social media space, but it's really growing in popularity, as of lately. So, this is another option that businesses can use to share their messages. What Instagram differs from Facebook and Twitter is that it's primarily a photo and video-based platform. It's not as much text content, or sharing links, or URLs to web-based content.

So, if you want to share a beautiful image, or to showcase work that you've done in a community, and you want people to visualize what you mean by your projects and your work, Instagram is a great tool and vehicle platform for that use.

[Karma Harris] I think that's a great update on taking three of some of the most popular platforms. I know there are others out there – and I really see the value in using these and I know a lot of our communities use each of these or some of these.

And so, thinking about that, Maggie, can you tell us a little bit about how your two Iowa communities used these platforms, and let us learn a little bit about how they actually apply it and use it on the local level?

[Maggie Ferguson] Sure. So, each of the communities really wanted to create a social media presence using platforms of their choice to either communicate the healthy inclusive messages, or just to share information specific to the project. So, they were tasked with choosing at least one social media platform to use for project messaging that they felt like they could sustain once the project was over.

So, in our Carroll, Iowa community, they disseminated information through their local health and wellness coalition. Because they're so rural, their membership cast a wide net in terms of reaching and engaging community partners. All in total, they have three different platforms that they're using: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and the folks that house those platforms include the Carroll County Health Department and then the lead organization, which is Homecare Options.

An example of what they're doing, the Carroll County Health Department includes a weekly Facebook post that details inclusive health messaging for the community. They also have announcements, or other project news, that they shared. And then the lead project organization, the Homecare Options, is in the process of really developing a more robust social media presence consisting of the three modalities that I have mentioned before: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and they will also link back to the local health department and to Platinum Fitness, who is their project partner.

In Sioux City, Iowa, that community uses a combination of traditional and non-traditional media to communicate their project messages and successes, as well as using statewide presentations to spread some of the information that they have done in their community, as well as really highlighting their work as some of the best practices to be used across the state. So, like in Carroll, they are using social media, and regularly implement inclusive health messaging into the messages that they sent out, and they are focused on using Facebook and Twitter as their platforms.

[Karma Harris] So that's interesting. So, we've learned a little bit about the types of social media platforms as recommended first use, and then we've learned a little bit about how the two Iowa communities use it. And now, I'm kind of in my head going back to Allison, and I really have a question of, you know, if we use these, who is creating these messages? How can we tell how effective our messages are?

[Allison Tubbs] Yes. So that's a very common question when you're utilizing social media for campaigns.

But there are many different ways that we can measure effectiveness of our social media messages. And when it comes down to, as we mentioned earlier, is first defining what your goals are related to your messaging and utilizing that as part of your communications plan. So that's really going to help you clearly identify what you want to analyze and what you want to show effectiveness related to your social media work. So, there are some common types of measurements that organizations can often track and report.

So, for the three platforms that we've been talking about: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, like I mentioned earlier, you have to create that business account and then once you've done that, it will allow you the free access to the analytic tools and insight metrics. So, I'm going to talk about three of the different types of measurements that we can utilize. So, the first one is called impressions, and what impression is, is simply just the total number of times that your content on social media is displayed to a user's newsfeed.

So, impressions can be considered a general measurement of reach because what it does is it gathers a total metric from people who follow your page, in addition to people who follow and share others' pages and engage with your content. The next metric is called engagement, and engagement is the number of times that people have engaged with your post. And what we mean by engagement, is they may have liked your post, they may have commented on your post, and they may have shared it.

So, engagement is really important to track because what it does, is it tells us how well we're building relationships with our audience, and whether our audience is really interested and invested in the messaging that we're putting out. So, if you're sharing a lot of posts on social media and your engagement rate is really low, then you might want to rethink your strategy and the type of messages that you're putting out. So, the third metric is called reach, and reach is just simply the number of people who had any content from your page, or about your page enter their screen on social media.

So, kind of wrapping it up, I think impressions, engagement, and reach are really the most important social media metrics to track, but you can also look at other things, like the number of followers on your pages. You can track whether that number increases or decreases. You can look at the number of messages that you're sharing. Also, the type of content that you're sharing, and you can track different demographic data about your audience.

So again, related to the different types of social media metrics that you want to measure to capture effectiveness of your communication, it really goes down to defining the clear goals and objectives, putting that into a communications plan, and then being able to match what the appropriate metrics are to your goals.

[Karma Harris] Thanks Alison. I think this is fascinating. Just learning about this and really thinking about the priority that social media plays in a lot of our lives and how we can use this as an effective vehicle, and making the numbers really stand out, I think would be a goal in our messaging.

So, Maggie, really thinking about these numbers, do you have any measures for social media in Sioux City and Carroll County? Can you give us the numbers? Do you have any information on how effective their social media messages were?

[Maggie Ferguson] Sure. Before I even share that, I just would say our Community Coaches really benefited from the training that Allison at NCHPAD was able to provide. She provided that overview of using social media in a communications webinar and then they were able to really put that to work for them.

So just to give you a snapshot idea of kind of how it's worked in our states collectively, the two communities Siouxland, or Sioux City, and Carroll County, they have implemented more than a 120 individual social media messages combined. And then with Facebook specifically, the total reach for the two communities has been 20,158 people and 1,559 engagements.

Then using Twitter as the platform, the total reach of the two communities has been 26,304 people and 803 total engagements.

[Karma Harris] I think those numbers are fascinating and I think for our listeners, even though this project is about four years old, we really only go into the communication content in the last two years, and only in this last year have they actually started implementing these messages. So, this data that Maggie is sharing with us, with Sioux City and Carroll, Iowa, really is representative just of the last project year. I think that's fascinating. So, I think you're right, Allison, that we could have multiple podcasts on some of the conversations we've talked about today.

So, from the perspective of someone like me who doesn't have a background in communication, I really find that important and I want to spend a few minutes thinking about a few activities that we need to make sure we're doing in order to be inclusive with our healthy community messaging.

So, in other words, we talked about the messaging, but now I want to learn about how we can make these messages that we're implementing and these activities inclusive to persons with disabilities. And, so, in thinking along that lens if you both were to give us some must-do advice when it comes to communicating messages inclusively, whether that's various communication activities or social media social marketing, what would that must-do advice be to make sure that inclusivity is considered? Maggie, I am going to turn to you first.

[Maggie Ferguson] For me personally, I think the best advice that we give you is making sure that you're considering people with disabilities when you're developing your messaging campaign. So a way to do that would be making sure that you involve people who experience disability in the activities, or including somebody that represents people with disabilities, whether it's a disability expert or somebody from a disability serving organization, and just getting those folks involved in the development of the messages, determining how you're going to be implementing or pushing those out, and then evaluating the activities around communication and dissemination.

Another suggestion that I might provide is to make sure that you're using a variety of accessible methods and formats when you're communicating and disseminating information. So, some thoughts around that could be thinking about how the platform that you're using. Are you using print, or digital? Are you using social media, or videos? Have you used large print or easy-to-read fonts, including

materials that are using Braille or pictograms? And then also, how are you disseminating information? Is it by using email, or snail mail for some of your marketing? So, using a variety of methods will help you reach a wide variety of groups of people, as well as people with disabilities and they should be included in your target audience.

[Karma Harris] That's great advice. I think all of us can benefit from that advice, Maggie, so thank you. Allison, in thinking about what we just heard from Maggie, do you have any other advice to build on with regard to inclusiveness?

[Allison Tubbs] Absolutely. So, we have to make sure that we are building accessibility into the messages that we're providing, and one way to do that is making sure that we are including descriptions when we're posting pictures for individuals who may be blind, or visually impaired. So the different social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram that we've talked about in this podcast, they all have what's called an alternative text, or alt text feature that you can use, built within the platform to help you describe the photos that you're sharing and posting.

So, another tip is that when you're sharing and using videos, you always want to make sure that you're including closed captioning. And then another best practice is to consider adding an audio description for those who may be blind. Another thing is I would advise to avoid using a lot of acronyms, or jargon, in your post and videos and making sure that you're effectively communicating in layperson terminology, that's easy to understand.

So finally, I would say this is probably the most important advice, is making sure that we are successfully including and involving people with disabilities, is that we have to show inclusion in our messages and we can do this by incorporating inclusive language in our posts, so things, such as person first terminology, or identity first language, provide an inclusive landscape for imagery.

Another way is making sure that you are actually using images of people with disability in your communications material and posts, and that those images represent a wide range of disability type and disability conditions. So those are just some simple ways of letting your audience know that the disability community is welcomed and included in your work and is visible in your communication strategy.

[Karma Harris] I think this wraps up a really fun segment on learning more about communication and dissemination and how to make it inclusive to people, how to do it correctly, and I just really want to thank Maggie Ferguson who's our State Expert Advisor from the state of Iowa and our project partner from NCHPAD, Ms. Allison Tubbs, for joining me in this particular podcast segment to talk about basics, communication and dissemination, and sharing some of their expertise in their examples with us about how to really communicate inclusively about inclusive healthy community changes.

So, thank you both for that, and then I also want to thank our listeners. So, if you've listened to all six of these, you have successfully listened to the whole podcast series on our national pilot project and

taking you through some core activity of inclusive healthy community change. And now that you've listened to this, it's our hope, we highly encourage you to really explore and initiate how you can do inclusive healthy communities work in your own state, or your community, really, so that all people can participate in every aspect of life to the best of their abilities and desires through healthy living.

And if you have any questions, there's a ton of resources out there with the CDC website. You can check out our project page on the NACDD website, as well as our project partners on the NCHPAD website for more resources. Thank you for joining us for this podcast series.