

Change and Implementation in Practice

Communications Planning



Effective communication planning is crucial in any change, implementation, or continuous quality improvement (CQI) effort. Well-planned communications can help child welfare agencies:

- ◆ **Clarify and improve understanding** of a system change or a new or adapted program, policy, process, or other intervention
- ◆ **Gather essential feedback** from those affected by or responsible for implementing change
- ◆ **Address uncertainty, practice transparency, and build trust** with individuals with vested interests throughout a change and implementation process
- ◆ **Generate buy-in**, engagement, and support for a change initiative among agency leadership, staff, system partners, and communities served
- ◆ **Use resources effectively** by aligning communication strategies with other agency initiatives or ongoing communication practices

Read about the foundations of a change communication plan and use the [fillable template](#) provided in this document to build a custom communication plan specific to your change effort, communication goals, and audiences.

Checklist for Getting Organized

As you prepare to use this tool to draft your change communications plan, it will be helpful to have the following:

- ☐ A list of your team members and collaborators and their respective roles in the change and implementation process¹
- ☐ Foundational documents or descriptions of the change your team is implementing, such as a program proposal, [theory of change](#), policy brief, or project outline that can help you craft key messages
- ☐ Key dates and project milestones
- ☐ Background information or historical context (consider other ongoing initiatives and previous implementation efforts your team might need to be aware of as you craft your messaging and choose appropriate strategies for your audiences)
- ☐ An understanding of possible communication challenges or barriers (consider where you might expect misunderstandings, miscommunications, or resistance)

¹ For more information on forming and sustaining effective teams, see the resources listed on the [Change and Implementation in Practice: Teaming webpage](#).

Use this tool to:

- ◆ Help your child welfare agency develop communication plans in support of your [change and implementation](#) efforts

Organization

[Foundations of a Change Communications Plan](#)

1. [Describe Your Change](#)
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Foundations of a Change Communications Plan

Communication planning can be broken down into eight essential components:

1. Change description
2. Communication goals
3. Identified audiences
4. Audience outreach groups or waves
5. Key messages
6. Communication strategies
7. Timelines
8. Measures of success

Communication plans are not one-size-fits-all and building one may not always follow a linear path. Teams further along in a change and implementation process may build on what they already have, revisit certain components as needed, or return to a step depending on their progress.

Follow the step-by-step instructions below to develop a comprehensive plan with each of these essential components. As you enter text in each section's fillable boxes, that text will also appear in a [consolidated communication plan template on page 22](#). Teams can also enter text and make revisions in the consolidated template and those changes will be mirrored in the step-by-step sections.

Step 1. Describe Your Change

A helpful starting point for a team's communication plan is to establish shared language for why your change effort is needed and a concise statement of what the selected intervention involves. Establishing a shared description can provide clarity among team members, help define the scope of your communications strategies, and serve as foundational messaging for teams to build on in future communication materials and key messages. Your description should draw from prior work the team has conducted to [explore a problem, need, or opportunity](#) and to [select or adapt an appropriate program, policy, process, or other intervention](#) to address it.

Use the space in **Step 1** of the template to document the following:

- ◆ **Title:** Identify a short title for the change effort or initiative. This will also serve as the title of your communications plan.
- ◆ **WHY it's important:** Describe the key reasons why your agency is undergoing this change. When audiences have a clear understanding of your agency's intent and why a change is being enacted, they are more likely to engage or accept the change throughout the implementation process. These reasons can serve as starting points when crafting persuasive messaging for specific audiences later in the communications planning process (discussed in Step 5).
- ◆ **WHAT it involves:** Describe the system change or new or adapted program, policy, or other intervention your team is working on. Keep this description high-level so that any audience member can read it and follow the main points. Avoid jargon or unnecessary details. Your team should be able to use this description on any public-facing communication material.



Examples

1. TITLE: Health at Home Program

WHY the change is important	WHAT the change involves
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ The number of young people in our state who report facing mental or behavioral health challenges is on the rise.◆ Too many young people end up receiving mental or behavioral health care in congregate care or institutional settings instead of community-based services while staying at home, where they could be better served.◆ Many families find it difficult to access local mental health or behavioral health services due to high costs, confusing eligibility requirements, and administrative barriers.	<p>The Health at Home Program is a new initiative by the State X Department of Health and Human Services to provide in-home mental and behavioral health services to young people. This program is designed to improve access to mental health services for young people aged 13 to 18. Through this program, eligible young people can receive free mental health screenings and behavioral assessments to identify and address underlying mental health conditions. The program will also connect families with a Health Navigator to guide them through screenings and help enroll eligible young people in community-based mental and behavioral health services. The Health at Home Program aims to reduce barriers to accessing mental health services, keep families together, and improve overall health outcomes for young people.</p>

1. TITLE: Tribal-State Child and Family Well-Being Network

WHY the change is important	WHAT the change involves
<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Children deserve to grow up in culturally rich environments that reflect their heritage.◆ Tribal leaders and representatives are the best experts on how to meet the unique needs of children, young people, and families from their own communities and cultural background.◆ Our child welfare agency can better serve the children, young people, and families in our state when we have strong relationships with tribal leaders and coordinate services and support together.	<p>The State Y Department of Child Welfare is partnering with American Indian and Tribal Nations to establish a joint Child and Family Well-Being Network. The network will help the agency partner with tribes in their region, implement tribal-state agreements, coordinate services, and leverage federal funding to comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act. The partnership will also support the agency in providing culturally appropriate services that meet the needs of Indigenous young people, parents, and families.</p>



Enter your team's change description below:

TITLE: _____

WHY the change is important	WHAT the change involves

Step 2. Set Communication Goals

Envision the outcomes your team hopes to see as a result of a successful communications plan. Clear communication goals can help your team strategize which audiences need to be engaged, clarify the scope of your messages, and determine which strategies will meet your needs best. Focus your ideas into one to three specific communication goals and document them in **Step 2** of the template.



Examples

2: COMMUNICATION GOALS

- ◆ Increase awareness of available services.
- ◆ Reduce staff confusion around a process change.
- ◆ Improve fidelity to a new agency practice model.
- ◆ Engage young people in foster care in the ongoing planning and delivery of services.
- ◆ Raise awareness among families and community members of upcoming opportunities to participate in the development and implementation of Child and Families Services Review (CFSR) Program Improvement Plans (PIPs).



Enter your team's communication goals below:

2: COMMUNICATION GOALS

Step 3. Identify Your Audiences

Identify who you need to communicate with to achieve your goals. Consider all the groups of people that will need to be involved with or aware of the change your team is implementing. This may include agency leaders, regional leaders or liaisons, program managers, IT and data staff, other teams or agency departments, supervisors, caseworkers, legal and judicial communities, other system partners, tribal representatives, young people, families, the media, legislators or government officials, and others. List all the audiences that come to mind in **Step 3A** of the template.

Once your audiences are identified, consider the following questions:

- ◆ What information will each audience need or want to receive from your communications? What do they care most about? How do you know?
- ◆ What actions do you want them to take?
- ◆ What concerns or other considerations might they have related to your change or intervention?
- ◆ What communication preferences or preferred communication channels do the audiences have?
- ◆ What dissemination channels or points of contact (e.g., email addresses, network meetings) do the agency currently use to connect with the identified audiences? What channels might need to be developed or expanded to reach this audience?

Getting to know each of your audiences will help your team develop relevant messages and strategies. Toward that end, engage representatives on your communication planning team from your key audiences—including individuals with lived experience in child welfare and representatives of the racial, ethnic, and intersectional identities in the communities served. Remember that no single perspective can reflect the diverse needs and interests of an entire group. Seek out multiple perspectives (e.g., through discussion groups or feedback sessions) and consider audience networks, available data sources, or related reports to tap into during communication planning. Summarize the information you have for each audience in **Step 3B** and **Step 3C** of the template.



Examples

3A: AUDIENCE	3B: AUDIENCE INTERESTS AND CONCERNS	3C: COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES AND NOTES
Agency leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Wants program and communication materials to align with agency values and strategic plans ◆ Prefers high-level talking points ◆ Will need to review and approve program plans and communication materials before external dissemination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Likes short emails with clear requests and requested deadlines ◆ Send requests and updates through a single contact ◆ Provide a minimum of 2 weeks for review ◆ Use visualizations or highlight key points and take-aways when sharing data
Community-based service providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Gaining community service provider buy-in will be crucial before implementation since they will play a major role in connecting families with services ◆ Will have questions about which of their services qualify for reimbursement under the revised program ◆ Are concerned with connecting families with services without adding burden on service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Regional Liaisons have relationships with providers and can serve as intermediaries in delivering messages ◆ Given information overload, set up tailored presentations through local networks
Parents and caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Appear particularly interested in housing support services ◆ Previously, families faced administrative burdens when trying to access these services and denials were common ◆ Communication materials will need to highlight the simplicity of the new referral process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A large percentage of the families our agency serves do not use English as their primary language; any family-facing materials will need to be available in Spanish and Vietnamese ◆ Families are not likely to subscribe to agency newsletter channels or social media pages ◆ Consider creating materials to be displayed in spaces families visit and trust, such as pediatrician offices, community centers, churches, childcare centers, etc.



Identify your audiences and their related interests, concerns, and communication preferences below:

* During Step 3, enter information in the first 3 columns (3A–C). Return to this chart to complete the final column in Step 4.

3A: AUDIENCE	3B: AUDIENCE INTERESTS AND CONCERNS	3C: COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES AND NOTES	4: AUDIENCE WAVE (FIRST, SECOND, THIRD)*

Step 4. Organize Audiences Into Outreach Waves

It is common for agencies to have many audiences they need to address in their communication plans. While tailoring messages and strategies to meet the individual needs and preferences of every audience is ideal, it is not always feasible given agency capacity. Identifying commonalities across audiences and considering the timing of their communication needs can help your team organize your audiences into more manageable groups for practical communication and outreach efforts.

Consider your team's communication goals, the roles of your audience members, and who needs to know what when. Think about:

- ◆ Which of your audiences will you need to connect with first?
- ◆ Who might you need to build buy-in with before you can connect with other audiences?
- ◆ Which audiences may share communication channels (e.g., regularly scheduled meetings, a listserv group, division newsletter)?

Use **Step 4** of the template (the last column of the previous chart) to sort your audience members into outreach waves (often referred to as primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences in marketing circles).



Notes and Examples

- ◆ **First wave:** Typically, the first wave will include the audiences you must communicate with first. Often, these individuals or teams will need to act or make decisions based on the communications (e.g., agency leadership) or will be directly involved in developing or implementing the intervention (e.g., program managers, case supervisors, workers, young people serving in co-creator or advisory roles).
- ◆ **Second wave:** Often, audiences in the second wave will include those who may not be directly responsible or involved in developing an intervention but will play a crucial role in its success (e.g., courts, other agencies, family networks). Consider which audiences will be your implementation partners.
- ◆ **Third wave:** Audiences in your third wave may not be directly involved in the implementation of your intervention. Still, the change may affect these audience members, or they may have a vested interest in its progress or outcome (e.g., parents and guardians, prospective foster parents, the general public). This group may include the primary beneficiaries of the change or intervention. However, they may appear later in your communication cycle if you need to engage first- and second-wave audiences before you reach them.

As the needs for communication with certain audiences will shift over time, don't think of these groupings as permanent or reflective of audience importance. For example, agency leaders or program funders may start in your first wave or primary audience early in the planning stage of an intervention but may shift into the secondary or third wave grouping as an intervention moves further along into implementation.

Return to the [table you started in Step 3](#) and for each audience listed label them first, second, or third wave.

Step 5. Develop Key Messages

Build on the information in Steps 1 through 4 and use the space provided in **Step 5** of the template to draft key messages for each wave of your audience groups. These messages should be the starting points for future communication materials and should resonate with each audience. When crafting audience-specific messages:²

- ◆ **Tailor your message:** Try to be consistent in your overall description while highlighting specific details or moving information that may be most pertinent to specific groups to the forefront. Customize messages to fit audience needs and interests noted in [Step 3](#). Consider what details will be most important to your audience and start your messages there.
- ◆ **Appeal to audience emotions:** Passion can be a powerful source of persuasion. Remember to balance logical arguments and facts with messages that resonate with your audience emotionally. Lead with the “why” driving your change to make your messages more persuasive.
- ◆ **Use positive and strength-based language:** Your language should reflect the strengths and assets of families and communities, rather than focus on deficits or problems. By doing so, agencies can shift the narrative from one of blame and shame to one that empowers families and young people and builds resilience.
- ◆ **Choose the right tone:** The tone of your message should match that of your audience. Consider whether a formal or informal tone is appropriate, define terms, and avoid using jargon or acronyms whenever possible.
- ◆ **Use visuals:** Visuals can often help to convey a message more effectively. Introduce images, videos, or infographics to illustrate your point and make your message more engaging.
- ◆ **Engage audience members to test your messages and visuals and gather feedback:** Consider sharing early drafts of your key messages or communications materials with members of your audience to make sure they resonate as intended. Revisit and revise messages as you learn more about your audience and receive their feedback.
- ◆ **Provide follow-up information:** Include a point of contact or a link to additional information, where appropriate, to enable feedback and ongoing communication.

² For more tips on crafting effective messages, see [NCWWI Communications Guide: How to Advance Organizational Goals Through Effective Messaging](#).



Examples

The sample key messages below reflect a scenario of a state agency launching a revised safety training program. The program has the goal of helping their child welfare workforce make more consistent safety decisions across regions, improve safety outcomes, and reduce racial disparities in removal rates among Black and Native American/American Indian children.

5A: AUDIENCE GROUPS	5B: KEY MESSAGES
First Wave: Agency leaders, team leaders and managers, members of the workforce training team and safety evaluation team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The new safety training curriculum will help staff more consistently apply safety practices and result in improved child safety and permanency outcomes across demographic groups. ◆ Tools will provide supervisors and caseworkers with practice scenarios and serve as a reference to improve learning and continuous improvement.
Second Wave: Regional managers, workforce supervisors, child welfare workers, tribal child welfare workers, university training partners, family partners, courts, other system partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The new safety training tools will provide caseworkers with more clarity and confidence in their safety decision-making. ◆ The new safety training program will offer caseworkers more support and opportunities to build skills and reflect on their achievements.
Third Wave: Families receiving child welfare services, community members, tribal representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The new safety training program for the child welfare agency workforce is intended to keep more children safely at home with their families. ◆ Our agency will continue to communicate with the community on our progress in addressing unfair bias and making more equitable removal decisions.



Develop key messages for each audience wave and enter below.

5A: AUDIENCE GROUPS	5B: KEY MESSAGES
First Wave:	
Second Wave:	
Third Wave:	

Step 6. Determine Communication Strategies

After developing key messages, determine the best communication strategies to deliver them. Consider the preferences of each audience group and the channels they are likely to use (identified in [Step 3](#)) as well as the timing and frequency of your proposed communication. Teams will often need to layer or use multiple communications strategies to make sure messages reach their intended audiences and achieve communication goals. For example, following a presentation, teams may email a summary message that reiterates important information.

Different strategies will require varying levels of effort depending on your teams' skills, experience, and access to communication tools and pre-existing channels. To help manage team capacity, consider which existing dissemination channels or ongoing activities your team can tap into. **While it is important for teams to connect with each audience and choose strategies that align with their specific preferences, there may be more efficient opportunities to reach multiple audiences at once or reinforce key messages. Teams may benefit by concentrating on fewer dissemination channels to allow staff to focus on the quality and frequency of their messaging.**

Use the space in **Step 6** of the template to document the following:

- ◆ **Communication strategies:** Briefly list or describe a selected communication strategy (e.g., email, presentation, social media, video). To spark ideas, refer to the [Commonly Used Communication Strategies](#) in [Appendix B](#) and brainstorm team suggestions.
- ◆ **Strategy description and deliverables:** Provide more detail on the strategy, including the specific steps or outputs that must be completed to advance this strategy.³ Your team might use the same strategy multiple times with variation to reach different audiences or disseminate tailored information. This space can help clarify those differences and highlight opportunities to expand.
- ◆ **Audience group:** Identify which audience(s) or wave group this strategy is intended to engage.
- ◆ **Person(s) responsible:** Indicate who will be responsible for completing the strategy. While several team members may contribute, specify the individual(s) that will be accountable.
- ◆ **Reviewer(s):** Document who will need to review the communication content or approve a task before it can be completed.
- ◆ **Frequency:** Consider how often your team will employ this strategy.

³ For more information and tips on selected communication strategies, see the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute's [Social Media Tips](#), [Video Tips](#), [Website Tips](#), and [Media Tips](#).



Examples

6A: STRATEGIES	6B: STRATEGY DESCRIPTION AND DELIVERABLES	6C: AUDIENCE GROUP	6D: PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	6E: REVIEWER(S)	6F: FREQUENCY
Promote a reference guide for workers to connect families with mental health supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Send internal agency messages and direct emails from supervisors to promote worker use of the handbook. ◆ Schedule announcements and reminders at large group and team meetings. 	First Wave	Health at Home Program Coordinator	Health at Home Program Manager Staff supervisors	Annual updates Reminders quarterly or as needed
Develop materials to build awareness of the new program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Create fliers and posters. ◆ Engage families with lived experience to co-create materials. ◆ Distribute materials in places where families are likely to see them, such as community centers, schools, and mental health clinics. 	Second Wave, Third Wave	Team communication lead	Leadership Team leads	Once with potential for revision on an annual basis
Hold presentations with mental health service providers, community-based organizations, and schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Identify potential community partners to help distribute information and refer families. ◆ Aim to meet with at least 25% of potential partners identified within 8 months of the program launch. ◆ Gather feedback and expand community partner list—Ask each partner, “who else should we meet with?” 	Second Wave	Health at Home Program Manager with support from Regional Community Liaisons	Regional Community Liaisons and their supervisors	Contact partners at least 2 times per year

 Determine communication strategies and enter the details below.

6A: STRATEGIES	6B: STRATEGY DESCRIPTION AND DELIVERABLES	6C: AUDIENCE GROUP	6D: PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	6E: REVIEWER(S)	6F: FREQUENCY

Step 7. Map Project Milestones and Engagement Opportunities

Developing a timeline and identifying key dates and milestones can help keep the communication plan on track. In **Step 7A** of the template, outline key timeframes to communicate with audiences and update them on progress or new developments. While some dates may currently be tentative, start with your team's best estimates and revise as needed.

Consider whether there are any opportunities to connect with your identified audiences through existing channels or other agency initiatives. By identifying dissemination channels of other teams and programs, leveraging partnerships, and tapping into existing networks, your team can increase the reach and impact of your messages.

Questions to consider:

- ◆ Are there key timeframes or deadlines you need to meet to achieve your communication goals?
- ◆ What related events or needs will affect communication timing?
- ◆ Are there time periods where it will be hard to get audience attention?
- ◆ Where can you strategically connect your team's work with other initiatives of the agency (e.g., Child and Family Services Plan, CFSR PIP, prevention planning, Court Improvement Program planning, agency CQI activities)?⁴
- ◆ Can you leverage the communication channels of other groups and partners to spread your messages?

Use the space in **Step 7B** of the template to note other initiatives or key dates your team should be mindful of when communication planning.

⁴ For more information on mapping major child welfare strategic planning efforts and identifying alignment and communications opportunities, see [Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Agency Process Alignment Tool](#).



Examples

7A: KEY DATES AND MILESTONES

<p>1. June/July</p> <p>Implementation team will host a “kickoff” meeting with leaders and other first wave audiences to align on key information, discuss plans for a January rollout, and outline proposed communication tools and materials.</p>	<p>2. August/September</p> <p>Team will set up meetings with key audience members and host focus groups to gather input from implementation partners, individuals with lived expertise, and others with a vested interest in the intervention.</p>	<p>3. October/November</p> <p>Team will incorporate audience feedback and make any revisions necessary to finalize first wave communications materials and prepare dissemination channels.</p>	<p>4. January</p> <p>Intervention rollout! Messages, announcements, and necessary information and materials will be shared.</p> <p>As this will be a busy time for our team, avoid adding new tasks and try to protect staff capacity this month.</p>	<p>5. February/March</p> <p>Continue to execute communication strategies. Aim for all deliverables outlined in our communication strategies to be completed by late March.</p>	<p>6. April/May</p> <p>Gather information to reflect on progress made toward the team’s communication goals and gauge the impact of communication plans and strategies.</p>
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7B: KEY DATES OR MILESTONES OF OTHER INITIATIVES TO BE AWARE OF

- ◆ The county workforce associations host a joint conference in February bringing together several of our audiences. Connect with the conference organizers to get on their agenda or identify other ways we can share our information with their participants.
- ◆ The website team will need at least a month to launch and troubleshoot a new webpage to support the intervention. We will need to finalize our webpage messaging and any materials it will host by early December if we want to have it ready in time for a rollout date in January.
- ◆ Leadership and the evaluation teams will be extra busy in September finalizing end-of-year reports. We should try to get their input on materials earlier in the year and anticipate approval delays if we ask them to review any proposals or materials towards the end of that month.



Identify project milestones, engagement opportunities, and related initiative information and enter below.

7A: KEY DATES AND MILESTONES

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7B: KEY DATES OR MILESTONES OF OTHER INITIATIVES TO BE AWARE OF

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Step 8. Define Your Measures of Success

By defining measures of success, your team can monitor progress, assess how well your communication plan achieves its goals, and adjust course as needed. Where possible, align your measures of success with the communication goals your team established in [Step 2](#) of the template. Consider:

- ◆ How will your team know if your communication plan is successful?
- ◆ Will completing the identified strategies advance your team's progress toward your goals? How will you track progress?
- ◆ How will your team gather feedback or monitor the quality of your communication materials and tactics?
- ◆ What can you learn to inform future communication strategies?

Below are a few ways teams can monitor the performance of their communication strategies, along with related considerations:

- ◆ **Track strategy deliverables.** Monitor whether your team completes the communication tasks outlined in your strategies ([Step 6B](#)). For example, did you disseminate the number of messages you originally intended? Did you connect with the desired number of families?
- ◆ **Review engagement survey results.** Conducting engagement surveys of audience members and other approaches for gathering feedback can help your team understand how well your chosen strategies resonate with your audiences.
- ◆ **Monitor message open or click rates.** Tracking the number of times your digital communication materials are opened, clicked, or downloaded can help your team determine the level of engagement and interest among your audiences. If your message open or click rates are low, you may want to consider revising your messaging or delivery strategy. This type of information may only be available when teams use message delivery platforms or employ other tracking tools.⁵ Meet with your agency's marketing, operations, or information systems staff for insights on which data are easily available and guidance on what technical measures of success might align best with your communication goals and priorities.
- ◆ **Revisit communication goals.** Has your team achieved your intended outcomes or made progress toward your goals (see [Step 2](#))? How do you know?

Use the space in **Step 8** of the template to restate your communication goals (8A) and describe aligned measures and how the team can monitor the measure (8B). Identify at least one measure per goal and, ideally, multiple approaches to gain a holistic picture of your team's performance and progress. Use the space provided in the 8C column to assign monitoring roles or note any information that might be helpful as your team works to understand team progress toward your communication goals.

⁵ For more information on building and tracking online engagement, see [Defining Benchmarks and Targets for Intranet KPIs](#) and other resources on [Digital.gov](#).



Examples:

8A: RESTATE COMMUNICATION GOAL	8B: DEFINE MEASURE(S) OF SUCCESS AND WAYS TO MONITOR	8C: NOTES FOR IMPLEMENTATION
Increase engagement of community partners and individuals with lived child welfare experience in the CFSR process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Track the number of people reached through each communication channel (open and engagement rates, outreach number). ◆ Track the number of community partners and individuals with lived experience involved in CFSR process. ◆ Assess the overall satisfaction level of community partners and individuals with lived experience engaged in the CFSR process through short surveys and focus groups. 	The evaluation team may already have survey questions and feedback tools they have used to gauge satisfaction with a different project. Connect with that team and get their advice before building a new survey from scratch.
Reduce confusion and improve fidelity around an agency process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Track the number of people reached through each communication channel (open and engagement rates, outreach number). ◆ Track the number of inquiries around the agency process. ◆ Monitor the number of process errors or delays in process completion. 	John on the CQI team would be able to share this information with us and share other insights on this performance goal.



Define your measures of success below.

8A: RESTATE COMMUNICATION GOAL	8B: DEFINE MEASURE(S) OF SUCCESS AND WAYS TO MONITOR	8C: NOTES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Final Reminders for Inclusive and Responsive Communication Practices

As your team works in the template to develop a tailored communication plan, consider the diverse perspectives, cultural characteristics, language preferences, accessibility, and other considerations of the communities your agency serves and the audiences your team hopes to engage. Through intentional planning and leveraging inclusive communication practices, child welfare agencies can create messages that resonate with their audiences and develop communication strategies that fit audience needs and preferences.

Tips for Inclusive Communication Practice

- ◆ **Collaborate with young people, families, and community partners** to tailor messaging, gather feedback, and spread the word. Lift up the voices of individuals from the racial, ethnic, and intersectional identities of the intended audiences. Partnering with community organizations, leaders, and influencers can help agencies co-create messages that reflect the values and aspirations of the community. This approach can foster trust and credibility with the community and ensure the messages are culturally appropriate and relevant.
- ◆ **Acknowledge and address audience concerns** as they come up and account for them in your messaging. Understanding past missteps, challenges, or barriers your audiences face isn't about dwelling on the negative. Quickly acknowledging concerns and providing clear counterarguments can help build trust, demonstrate cultural humility, and avoid unnecessary anxiety. Community members and individuals with lived experience can help identify audience concerns before your team develops messaging.
- ◆ **Experiment with media and interactive formats**—such as videos, podcasts, webinars, and social media campaigns—to engage diverse audiences and expand the reach of your communication. These formats can help convey complex information in an accessible and engaging way, promote dialogue, and prompt feedback from your audience.
- ◆ **Evaluate and update strategies often** to ensure their continued relevance, impact, accessibility, and inclusivity over time. Teams should continually assess their messages based on feedback from their audience and emerging trends and issues.

Remember that communications plans are living documents. Just as your team's change and implementation effort will evolve over time, your communication plan will need revisiting on a regular basis. Use the communications plan template as either a starting point for a new plan or as an opportunity to revisit a plan already in progress.

Learn more about communications planning and engagement to support change and implementation:

- ◆ [Strategic Communication Hub – Communication Strategies for Change](#) (W.K. Kellogg Foundation)
- ◆ [Guidance on Building Better Digital Services in Government](#) (Digital.gov)
- ◆ [NCWWI Communications Guide: How to Advance Organizational Goals Through Effective Messaging](#) (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute)
- ◆ [Change and Implementation in Practice: Implementation Planning and Capacity Building](#)
- ◆ [Change and Implementation in Practice: Teaming](#)
- ◆ [Strategic Planning in Child Welfare: Strategies for Meaningful Youth, Family, and Other Partner Engagement](#)
- ◆ [Strategies for Authentic Integration of Family and Youth Voice in Child Welfare](#)
- ◆ [Building and Sustaining Collaborative Community Relationships Foundational Steps for Collaboration](#)

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Appendix A: Full Communication Plan Template

The following is a consolidated Communications Plan Template. Teams that follow the step-by-step instructions above will find their full responses repeated below. Others may opt to complete the full template here. Review and refine the full communications plan as a whole and share as appropriate before beginning to implement.

Step 1. Describe Your Change

TITLE: _____

WHY - Describe the reasons why your agency is undergoing this change or intervention.	WHAT - Describe the system change or a new or adapted program, policy, process, or other intervention your team is working on.

Step 2. Set Communication Goals

2: COMMUNICATION GOALS - Outline the specific outcomes your team hopes to achieve as a result of your communication efforts.

Steps 3 and 4. Identify Your Audiences and Organize Into Waves

3A: AUDIENCE	3B: AUDIENCE INTERESTS AND CONCERNS	3C: COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES AND NOTES	4: AUDIENCE WAVE (FIRST, SECOND, THIRD)*

Step 5. Develop Key Messages

5A: AUDIENCE GROUPS – List audience based on how you sorted them in Step 4.	5B: KEY MESSAGES – Consider the audience needs and interests your team identified in Step 3B and refine those ideas into messages for each audience group.
First Wave:	
Second Wave:	
Third Wave:	

Step 6. Determine Communication Strategies

6A: STRATEGIES	6B: STRATEGY DESCRIPTION AND DELIVERABLES	6C: AUDIENCE GROUP	6D: PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	6E: REVIEWER(S)	6F: FREQUENCY

Step 7. Identify Project Milestones and Engagement Opportunities

7A: KEY DATES AND MILESTONES

7B: KEY DATES OR MILESTONES OF OTHER INITIATIVES TO BE AWARE OF

Step 8. Define Your Measures of Success

8A: RESTATE COMMUNICATION GOAL	8B: DEFINE MEASURE(S) OF SUCCESS AND WAYS TO MONITOR	8C: NOTES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Appendix B: Commonly Used Communication Strategies



Teams may consider these and other strategies to communicate messages to audiences and gather input from them.

STRATEGIES	REACH	PURPOSE AND USAGE NOTES	EXAMPLE
Focus Groups	Small to midsize groups, agency staff, other departments, or external partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Helpful for collecting detailed or qualitative information from small groups ◆ Good for gathering feedback and ideas from audiences to inform decision-making 	◆ Focus group of young people in care on how to shape a new program
Surveys	Midsize to large groups, external audiences, or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Helpful for collecting information anonymously from large groups in an organized way ◆ Good for gathering feedback and ideas from audiences to inform decision-making 	◆ A workforce survey to gauge the well-being of child welfare workers and collect suggestions to improve employee moral
Townhalls and question and answer sessions	Midsize to large groups, external audiences, or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ An in-person or virtual convening of community members or agency staff to discuss issues and share ideas ◆ Promotes dialogue by providing a platform to voice opinions ◆ Good for gathering feedback and ideas from audiences to inform decision-making 	◆ A townhall meeting to gather input from parents and community members on potential new agency services and hear their concerns
Email message	Team members, decision-makers, individuals, or small groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide updates and upcoming deadlines on a specific project or initiative ◆ Communicate with individuals or small groups ◆ Share important documents 	◆ Announcement of where to find guidance for a new procedure
Memos	Small to midsize groups, agency staff, other departments, or external partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Communicate time-sensitive information or reminders to either internal audiences or external partners ◆ Often delivered via email but more formal than regular email messages 	◆ A memo sent to agency staff to remind them of an upcoming deadline to input information in a tracking system

STRATEGIES	REACH	PURPOSE AND USAGE NOTES	EXAMPLE
Newsletters	Midsized to large groups, external audiences, or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide regularly scheduled messages to keep audiences informed about updates, changes, accomplishments, and ongoing activities ◆ Often disseminated over email via mass messaging platforms or agency listservs ◆ May also be distributed in print format or posted online as a blog 	◆ Quarterly newsletter to agency staff and community partners to describe progress in a prevention initiative, celebrate successes, highlight upcoming activities, and feature how feedback has been incorporated
Social media	Midsized to large groups, external audiences, or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Share updates, raise awareness, and engage with broader audiences or the public ◆ Interactive 	◆ Posts to Facebook to promote a new program and share success stories with families
Handouts, flyers, and brochures	Midsized to large groups, external audiences, or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Summarize key information in easy-to-understand and visually appealing way ◆ Easy to print to distribute at events or meetings ◆ Can be disseminated digitally via agency or partner channels 	◆ Handout describing new partnership to expand postadoption services
Infographics	Midsized to large groups, external audiences, or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Present complex information or data in a way that is easy to understand ◆ Uses visuals, imagery, graphics, and limited text 	◆ An infographic to show the number of children in foster care broken down by setting and racial/ethnic groups
Videos	Midsized to large groups, external audiences, or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Convey important messages in an engaging way ◆ Shorter is better for maintaining audience attention 	◆ A video to explain an agency's vision and describe the impact of its work
Webpage or website	Midsized to large groups, external audiences, or the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Presents content to a variety of audiences simultaneously with easy access ◆ Allows individuals to digest information at their own pace ◆ Can be updated to reflect new information over time 	◆ Webpage on protective factors to promote family well-being

STRATEGIES	REACH	PURPOSE AND USAGE NOTES	EXAMPLE
Reports, briefs, or proposals	Team members, decision-makers, individuals, or small groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide detailed information about a topic, complex issue, policy, program, or project. ◆ May require more staff capacity and time to develop ◆ Can use key points in other less intensive materials such as a newsletter, infographic, or brochure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Report of evaluation findings to support expansion of an evidence-based program
Talking points	Team members, decision-makers, individuals, or small groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Guide leadership and other presenters through conversations or presentations for other audience members ◆ Ensure key information is covered and messages are delivered in clear and concise ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Talking points to help agency leaders discuss a proposed policy change with legislators
Meetings	Team members, decision-makers, individuals, or small groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Discuss important topics, answer questions, and provide updates ◆ Can be in person or online (e.g., video conference) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A staff meeting to discuss upcoming practice changes
Presentations	Small to midsize groups, agency staff, other departments, or external partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide clear and concise information along with visuals ◆ May engage audiences more than written materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A presentation for a group of parents and caregivers to highlight available services and programs.
Webinars	Small to midsize groups, agency staff, other departments, or external partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide training, information, or updates to a variety of internal or external audiences ◆ Convenient for accessing information online from anywhere or on-demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Webinar on the upcoming CFSR to build understanding of its importance, what to expect, roles, and responsibilities
In-person training sessions	Small to midsize groups, agency staff, other departments, or external partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use to teach new skills or build capacity for new ways of working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A training session for supervisors to learn about and practice a new agency coaching model