

Messages Matter

Build Positive Perceptions and Increase
Community Buy-In for Youth Programs



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About

Messages Matter: Build Positive Perceptions and Increase Community Buy-In for Youth Programs provides Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) grantees and other youth-serving program providers with practical information and tools to expand community buy-in, increase parent engagement, and disrupt misinformation. The approaches described use communication theory and best practices to align with and build upon the community's goals and values. *Messages Matter* is designed to help providers navigate challenges arising from misinformation that can impede youth programming. Challenges range from mild opposition and concern to efforts to remove various types of youth programming from schools altogether. Many of the concerns or misconceptions about programming can be attributed to inadequate information, misinformation, or in rare instances, disinformation. This resource guide is designed to help youth service providers proactively address these kinds of challenges before they arise. *Messages Matter* builds upon key concepts, approaches, and activities presented in the [Community Saturation Sourcebook](#) and [Community Saturation Toolkit](#).

SECTION 1

MESSAGING: HOW TO BRAND OR REBRAND YOUR APP PROGRAM

Framing the Message: Emphasizing Your Program's Positive Youth Development Approach

Adolescent pregnancy prevention efforts have made great strides in reducing the nation's adolescent pregnancy rate over the last 30 years. Work done by FYSB Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) grantees and other youth-serving program providers has contributed to this progress through approaches such as:

- Increased use and access to evidence-based programs and interventions
- Increased access to more effective methods of contraception
- Promotion of more comprehensive, holistic approaches that improve adolescent health and well-being





Despite well-documented successes (in pregnancy prevention and reduced risky behaviors),^{1,2} many youth-serving program providers experience opposition from parents, schools, and the broader community. Misinformation and controversy surrounding sexual health education topics and curricula distract from some of the broader aims of APP programming. In addition to the goals of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), APP programs promote positive youth development and adolescent development and well-being through education on topics like healthy

relationships, communication, goal setting, financial literacy, and self-regulation.

You share a common goal with parents and the community: equipping and empowering youth to become healthy, productive adults. By crafting, promoting, and amplifying messages that lead with the overall goal of your program—adolescent development and well-being—you are more likely to establish meaningful connections, build trust, and garner support in your community.

Developing Messages to Highlight Your Program's Broader Values: Positive Youth Development

Why is messaging important?

Good messaging can shape and influence perceptions. By increasing knowledge and awareness about your program, you are in a better position to strategically dismantle misinformation, false beliefs, and other opposition to your program. For example, by shifting and expanding the focus of program messaging beyond sexual health education to emphasize **how** these successes are achieved (e.g., through teaching about healthy relationships, setting boundaries and goals, and self-regulation strategies), you can reframe—or rebrand—your program's success through the lens of adolescent development and well-being. By creating with messaging that resonates with values and goals your community embraces, you begin the process of shifting public opinion and garnering buy-in for the important work you are doing.



Developing a Message Strategy for Promoting Positive Framing

Okay, now that you're on board with taking a new approach to your program's brand and overall message strategy, it's important to understand that framing a message is about positioning—making sure the intent and content are interpreted as intended.³ A message strategy will help your program stand out (for the right reasons) and it will help you connect with your community in a meaningful way. It helps you communicate about your program consistently across various channels, including social media and websites. It also makes it easier for program staff/colleagues to accurately share consistent information about your program. By targeting your community with clear messages, community members will have a better understanding of the work that you do and why it's important.

A messaging strategy will tell your community the “what, why, and how” of your program. It offers a thoughtful way to answer seemingly simple, yet often tricky questions like, “what does your program do?” A messaging strategy is one of the most important elements of how and what you communicate about your program. It ensures consistency and coordination of messages about your program across all communication channels. A messaging strategy includes three important pieces of information:

- Communication objectives
- Positioning
- Key messages



Step 1: Know Your Why

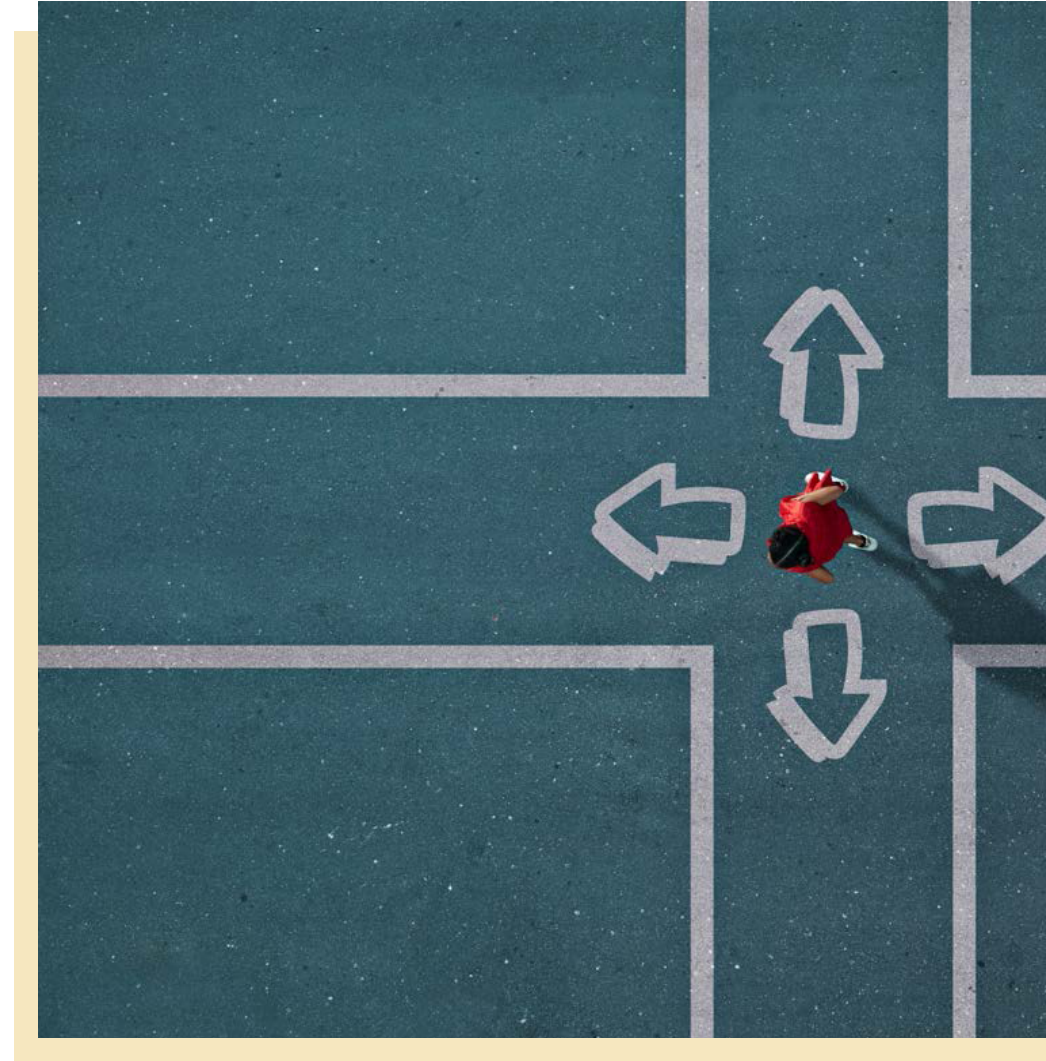


You would never take a trip without knowing why you're leaving. The same is true with communication. It's important to know your why. What is your goal for delivering a particular message or statement? If you are trying to build support and decrease resistance to your program, your "why" will likely fall within at least one of the following three communication goals. It may be best to begin with one goal and expand to others as resources permit.

1. Raise general awareness about your program.
2. Educate your community (or groups in your community) about an issue your program addresses.
3. Address and counter misrepresentations about your program (more on this later under misinformation/disinformation).

Once you've identified your why, draft a one- to two-paragraph statement that describes what you want to communicate with your message (your intent) and how you want the audience to interpret or respond to that message.

Don't be surprised if you have to rewrite the statement a few times until it captures everything that you want to accomplish. Most importantly, don't skip this step! Articulating your why will give you the foundation and clarity to create and frame your message.



Step 2: Identify Your Who



Knowing who you want to reach (your audience) *before* you develop a message ensures that the message is clear and concise. It's also important to consider why your audience may be interested in the information and how it might compare with what they already know or believe about your program (pre-conceived notions). This may also be an opportunity to identify key values or common interests among your audience. These touchpoints can create powerful connections with your audience by engaging their emotions.

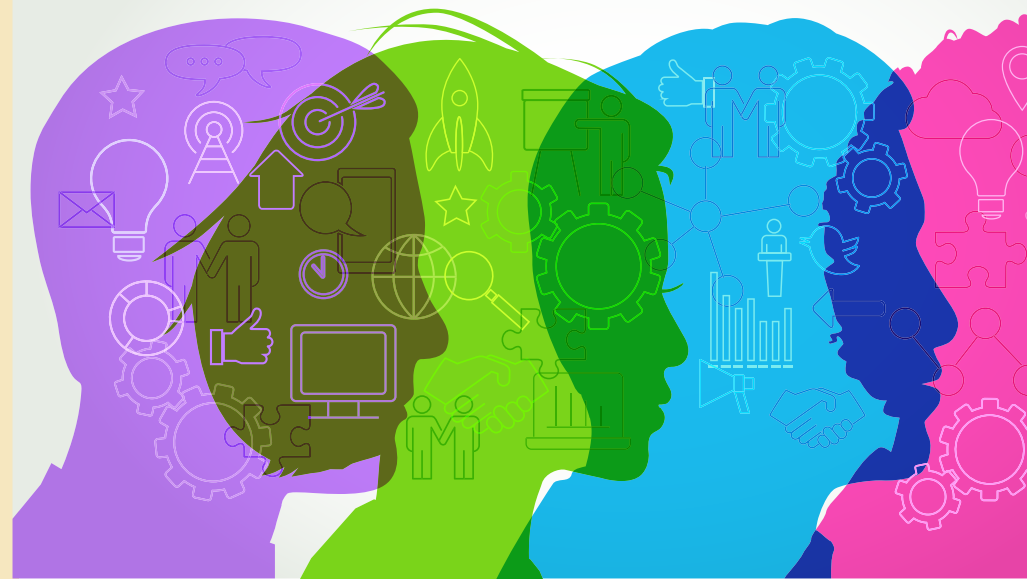
Emotional appeal is a proven method to encourage people to take a particular action by creating an emotional response.⁴ An emotional appeal can take many forms and help your messages bypass common filters such as skepticism, bias, or fear. By evoking positive emotions and establishing an emotional link, you capture your audience through an emotional connection. This helps your audience identify with your message on a visceral level. An emotional link can also make your message(s) more memorable.



How to Appeal to Your Audience⁵

- Choose the right emotions.
- Use emotional words and phrases.
- Tell stories and anecdotes.
- Use images and videos.

You may have to create a unique persona for each of your audiences (e.g., parents, teachers, administrators, other youth-serving program providers). If this is the case, carefully consider if your message needs to be tailored for each audience or if there is enough common ground between the audiences that the messaging can be shared.



Personas: A Tool to Help Create Unique Messages for Your Audience

Creating personas can help you recognize and reach different individuals and groups in your audience. Personas are fictional snapshots of members in your community. They often include key demographics, values, needs, and priorities of your audience.⁵ By understanding the needs, experiences, behaviors, and goals of your community members, you are better positioned to develop messages that resonate with them.

There are a number of ways that you can gather information to create your personas:

- Staff interviews
- Stakeholder interviews
- Focus groups



Key Parts of a Persona

- Persona title (describes the mindset of the group this individual represents)
- Background (provides a narrative that captures the essence of the persona's situation or dilemma)
- Common challenges, frustrations, needs, or aspirations

Example Persona

Sandra the Single Mom

Background

Sandra is a single mother of three teens. She works two jobs and gets home late every night. There's an afterschool program in her neighborhood, but she doesn't think she can afford to enroll her kids.

Challenges

- Limited transportation; uses public transportation
- No job flexibility to be with her kids
- No social supports
- Very little quality time with children
- Oldest daughter is becoming distant and doesn't talk much anymore

How can we help?

- Provide transportation vouchers.
- Offer virtual open house or meet and greets for parents and caregivers.
- Provide food/meals near dinner time.
- Use multiple channels and methods to communicate and deliver programming to parents and caregivers.
- Establish a clear, accessible presence for your organization to build trust with parents and caregivers (e.g., an open-door policy for informational inquiries).

Step 3: Develop Your Message and Content



Finally! It's time to develop your message.

Positive framing is a strategic tool that can maximize the impact of messages about your program and overall communications. Positive framing is persuasive and, most of all, presents your program—its goals, activities, and successes—as a solution to many of the challenges that youth experience/encounter on the path to adulthood.

Frame your messages in a positive manner to establish (or trigger) affirmative associations with your program.

1. Always lead with a positive statement when you are communicating about a problem/solution. Negative headlines are often associated with fear and/or failure.
2. Always include proof points. This means, when possible, back up statements with data to add credibility to your message and address misinformation or misrepresentations about your program.

To begin, draft a one- to two-paragraph statement that describes why you want to communicate your message. The first sentence will include your goal (or your why) and what you want to communicate about your program. The following prompts include goals and example messages that you may want to communicate to your community.

*See [Resources](#) for topic-specific materials.



Prompt 1: Describe the importance of co-responsibility to ensure youth in your community become healthy adults.

Goal: Educate your community on the importance of shared responsibility for youth.



Prompt 2: Describe the benefits of PYD.*

Goal: Make parents and the community aware of the benefits of PYD and supporting your program.



Prompt 3: Describe the benefits of APS.*

Goal: Make parents and the community aware of the benefits of APS and supporting your program.



Prompt 4: Present the myths and realities of your program.

Goal: Address misinformation in the community.



Prompt 5: Present the benefits of community working together to achieve common goal.

Goal: Underscore the importance of working together to help adolescents achieve their potential.

SECTION 2

MISINFORMATION: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

Steering Clear of Misinformation

As a youth-serving program provider, you may find yourself front and center to the effects of false information, rumors, and misperceptions. The current information environment presents numerous challenges and real threats to the important work that you do for our nation's youth. Misinformation (and disinformation) can have polarizing effects that fuel questions about your program and organization. These questions can undermine credibility and distract from the real message—you are making a difference. You are equipping youth with knowledge and skills to grow and flourish throughout life.



Health misinformation is a serious threat to public health. It can cause confusion, sow mistrust, harm people's health, and undermine public health efforts. Limiting the spread of health misinformation is a moral and civic imperative that will require a whole-of-society effort.

Vivek H. Murthy, MD, MBA

U.S. Surgeon General

Confronting Health Misinformation: The U.S. Surgeon General's
Advisory on Building a Healthy Information Environment



How and Why Does Misinformation Spread?

Misinformation often spreads because it offers an explanation to a problem or provides an answer to a hard question. In some instances, misinformation can also help make sense of events that are difficult to understand. People are vulnerable to misinformation because we sometimes tend to accept information as true without verifying or confirming it. We are also more likely to believe information is true if it comes from a trusted source like a family member or a friend.⁶

What Can Be Done: Tips and Strategies to Reduce the Impact of Misinformation

Misinformation is complex in nature and requires a coordinated strategy to debunk false information and build trust. There is no single solution to address misinformation. However, there are a number of strategies that can help mitigate misinformation about your program.

Table 1. Tips to Stop the Spread of Misinformation

Tip	How to...
Encourage compassion	Approach any effort to address misinformation with compassion. Most people filter information (including misinformation) through personal values and beliefs. Therefore, emotionally charged topics and issues can easily polarize attitudes. ⁷ Do not answer misinformation with anger, criticism, or ridicule. You may do more harm.
Engage a communications or media/public relations specialist	Identify/engage communications experts in your organization (e.g., a communications specialist or media/public relations specialist). These individuals can provide guidance on how to translate information about your program into messaging that resonates with your community.
Learn what people are hearing/encountering	<p>Identify ways to keep a pulse on misinformation that is circulating in your community.</p> <p>Social listening or social media listening is the process of identifying and assessing what is being said about a company, individual, brand, or in this instance, your organization.⁸ It can help you understand what questions and knowledge gaps exist in your community. These insights can inform how you counter myths and threats, in your community. It can also help inform long-term strategic decisions about your organization and service delivery.</p> <p>There are a number of free social listening tools to help analyze public perception about your organization. For example you can monitor your community's response to an event your program hosted and even analyze discussions or hashtags among parents and caregivers in the community.</p> <div data-bbox="520 1417 615 1511"> </div> <p data-bbox="632 1430 1927 1498">Social listening is different from social monitoring. Social monitoring tells you what people are saying on social media. Social listening helps you understand why people are saying what they are saying.</p>

Tip	How to...
Empower/encourage information seeking	<p>Make accurate information easily accessible and encourage analytical thinking. Engaged thinkers are less vulnerable to misinformation. Look for opportunities to educate your community on internet safety and how to think critically when interacting online and with the media. This can encourage information seeking and help facilitate more efficient analysis of information in your community. Invite community members to explore and provide feedback on your website (e.g., how easy is it to find what they're looking for, what message(s) do the resources deliver).</p>
Collaborate	<p>Collaborate with key leaders, stakeholders, and other trusted sources/individuals in your community.</p>
Build trust	<p>Look for opportunities to build and expand trust in your program. Trust is a unique mix of perceptions around credibility, reliability, and shared interest.</p> <p>For example, you can partner with local organizations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Host community events (e.g., back to school clinics to provide immunizations and school supplies). ● Link community members to social supports and resources. <p>Other trust building tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide clear and frequent communication in an open and honest way. ● Follow through on promises—do what you say you're going to do. ● Exhibit humility and vulnerability. ● Ask questions with genuine curiosity. ● Take time. ● Share information that may help community members be successful.

Information-Based Strategies to Combat Misinformation



Strategy 1: Match and Prioritize

No information platform or channel is exempt from misinformation. When you encounter misinformation on a platform, you must first determine if you want to address it. If the answer is yes, then your response should be communicated on the same channel (e.g., X, formerly known as Twitter, Facebook, or an article in the local newspaper). Next, you must prioritize what you want to address. Your message should be direct, simple, and as brief as possible.



Strategy 2: Fill in the Gaps

Misinformation is easily adopted when people have limited information or knowledge about an issue. Therefore, it is important to **clarify why something is untrue, identify information gaps, provide direct rationales, and use relatable examples.**

This approach will help debunk false information and help your community understand the context of any new information that they may receive.

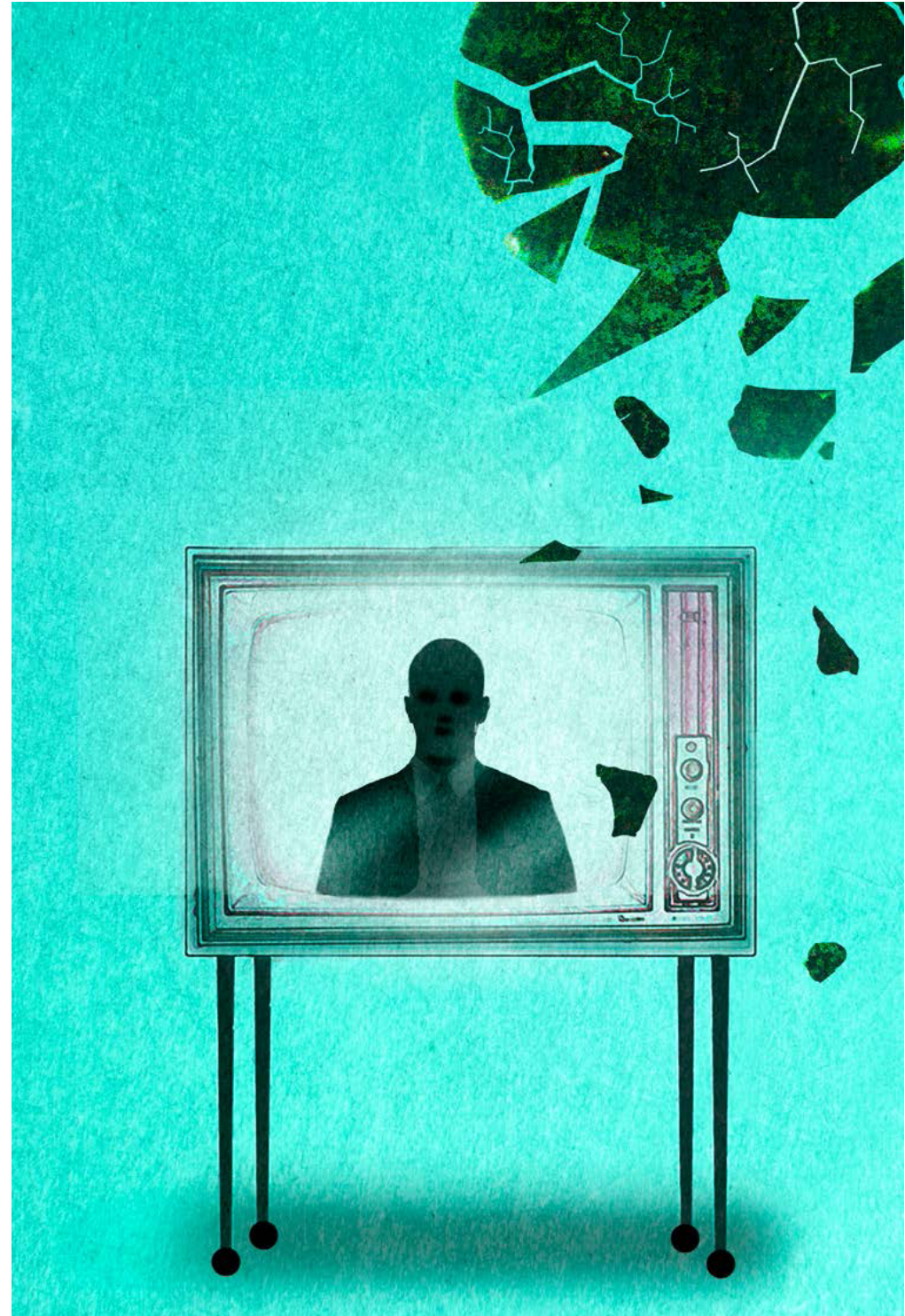
Strategy 3: Correct Early and Often



If you decide that you need to address an instance of misinformation in your community (see Strategy 1), you should **correct misinformation early and often**. The longer misinformation goes without being corrected, the more likely people are to assume it's true.

It's important to know that information that seems familiar is more likely to be accepted as true. Therefore, it's critical that you emphasize the facts you want to communicate and **REPEAT** them. Repeated exposure to corrections and counterarguments can promote accurate and well-informed beliefs.

Note: It's best to avoid restating dangerous myths and other misinformation. However, when a particularly dangerous myth persists, it's time to address misinformation head on. Any corrections and counterarguments should not mention the misinformation without a warning or the right context. This ensures people are on guard mentally and less likely to be influenced by the misinformation.⁹ You might also consider a **truth sandwich**. A truth sandwich starts with the truth (fact), briefly mentions the misinformation and why it's false, and finishes by restating the truth in more detail, offering sources to back it up.^{10,11}





Strategy 4: Let Data Tell the Story

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a simple graph, chart, or other data visualization can debunk misinformation at a glance because they grab attention and are easy to read. People also process visuals faster and retain the conveyed information longer.¹² Whenever possible, **leverage graphs and visualizations, follow good design practices, and keep it simple!**



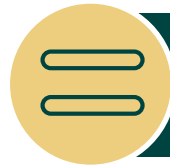
Strategy 5: Neutralize Misinformation with Inoculation

Inoculations are proactive communication efforts that warn about impending misinformation. They provide correct information to prevent misperceptions from developing. This strategy immunizes people against misinformation by pre-exposing them to weakened versions of manipulation techniques. This approach equips people with information to help them spot false and misleading information and how to refute it. As often as possible, **inoculate for misinformation.**

Successful examples of inoculation activities include “**prebunking**” videos that teach people how they might be manipulated online. Recently, a group of researchers

inoculated nearly 1 million YouTube users against misinformation with a [series of 90-second videos](#).¹³ Prebunking videos and brief **online games**^{13,14} have been found to impart psychological resistance against common manipulation techniques used in online misinformation.¹⁵ Common manipulation techniques include the following¹⁶:

- **Emotional language:** language designed to cause outrage or fear, moral outrage, conspiracy theories, trolling, and discrediting.
- **Incoherence:** unclear, confusing, illogical, or inconsistent language.
- **False dichotomies:** false statements/arguments (in context or content) that appear to be correct; these false arguments often oversimplify choices and limit options to only two choices, where there could be many.
- **Scapegoating:** blaming an individual, organization, or institution for wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others.
- **Ad hominem attacks:** ads that discredit a person or attempts to invalidate their statement or argument.
- **Fake experts:** information presented from people who pretend to be experts but who don't have any relevant expertise on certain issues.¹⁷



Strategy 6: Find Common Ground



Misinformation can be difficult to correct because it may be central to a person's identity, values, or world views. When addressing misinformation, always remember to **affirm your audience's (or community's) sense of self**. This means that you can call attention to their values and ideas and reassure them that their concerns and interests are important. Focus on opportunities and potential benefits rather than risks and threats.⁹ One way to do this is to remind parents, caregivers, and the broader community that you share a common goal—equipping and empowering youth to become healthy adults—and that you must work together to make sure youth have the support and opportunities they need.



Strategy 7: Leverage Credibility



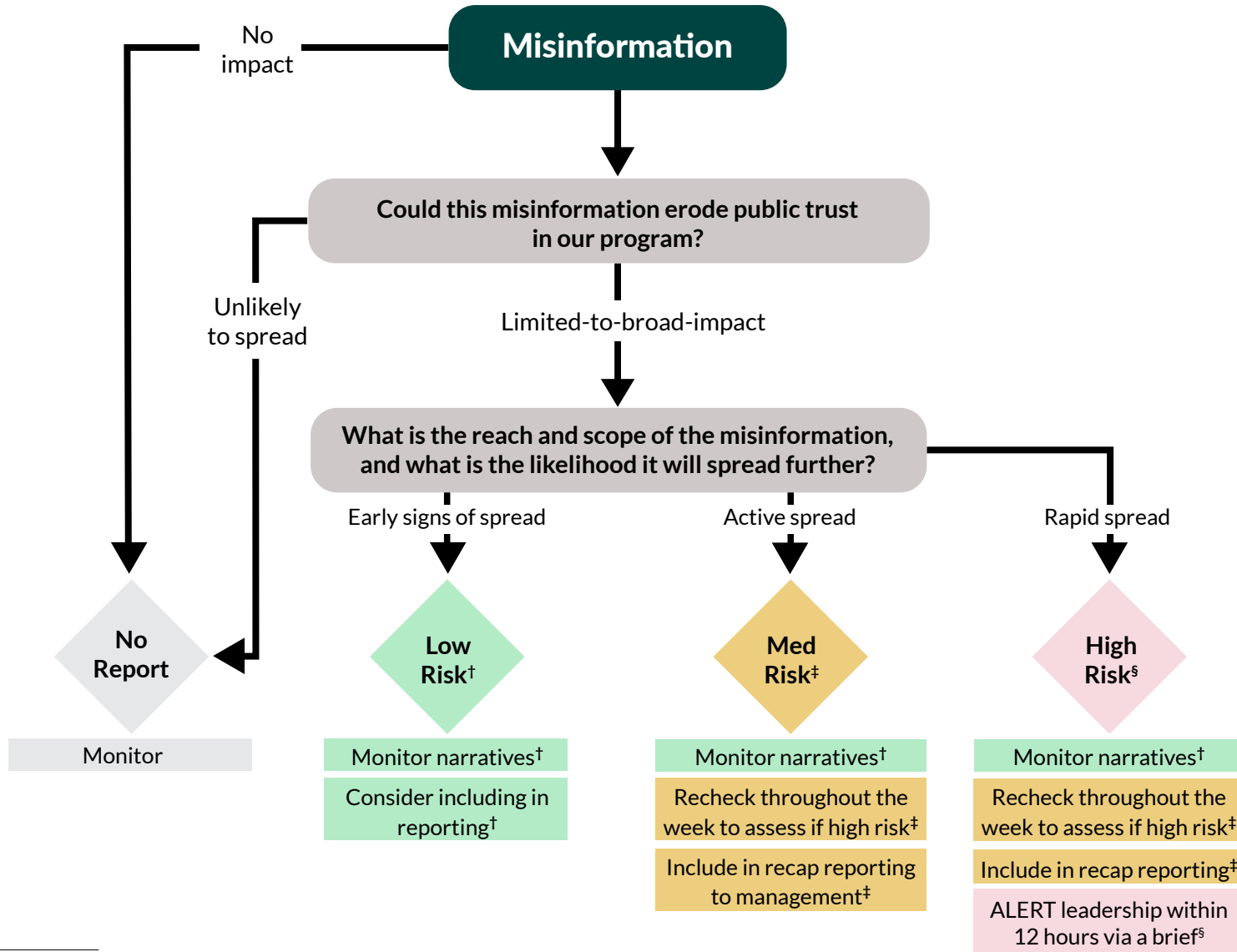
Credibility is an important factor for whether corrections are believed or not. Credibility is often made up of two components: expertise and trustworthiness. This means the messenger is just as important as the message when tackling misinformation. Moreover, some research suggests that trustworthiness is more important than perceived expertise when debunking misinformation. The moral of the story? **Choose your communicator wisely.**

A Stepwise Approach/Framework to Address Misinformation

(Framework applies to internal and external communication)

Internal Communication

This diagram provides a step-by-step approach on how to monitor and initiate internal communication about misinformation in your community.



†Low risk
‡Medium risk
§High risk

External Communication

The following tables can be used to guide external communication if you determine there is misinformation in your community. Each table provides at least one communication goal and suggested activities for each audience that you may want to engage. Tables are organized by level of risk.*

Low Risk Response[†]	Goal ▶ Set information priorities and fill information gaps
Community (WHO you should communicate with)	Communication Activities (HOW you can communicate)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents ● Caregivers ● Guardians ● School/Educators ● General Public ● Youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Weekly service-oriented health stories ● Share stories and social assets via social media
Low to Medium Risk Response[†]	Goal ▶▶ Set information priorities and fill information gaps Address underlying confusion and concerns
Community-Based Partners (WHO you should communicate with)	Communication Activities (HOW you can communicate)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth development groups ● Healthcare/Healthcare Providers ● Local information/resource hubs (e.g., library, city hall, clubs) ● Referral organizations ● Culture- and ethnicity-based organizations ● Youth Ambassadors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide misinformation alerts, talking points, trainings ● Distribute newsletters, social assets (social media messages) ● Update program website with tailored alerts and recommendations

*The level of misinformation risk may be determined by referencing the Stepwise Approach/Framework to Address Misinformation diagram.

[†]Low risk

Medium to High Risk Response[‡]	Goal ▶ Address underlying confusion and concerns ▶ Directly address specific misinformation
Local News Media (WHO you should communicate with)	Communication Activities (HOW you can communicate)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local News Outlets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Newspapers – Radio – Television 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide real-time weekly insights ● Offer collaborative training workshops ● Establish direct relationships with journalists and/or other news outlets
Medium to High Risk[§]	Goal ▶ Address underlying confusion and concerns ▶ Directly address specific misinformation
Community Leaders (WHO you should communicate with)	Communication Activities (HOW you can communicate)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youth Ambassadors ● Parent Teacher Organizations ● 4-H/Extensions ● YMCAs ● Boys & Girls Clubs ● Local business owners ● Church leaders ● Elected officials/politicians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide misinformation alerts, talking points, trainings ● Distribute newsletters, social content and hashtags ● Engage influencers
Medium to High Risk[§]	Goal ▶ Address underlying confusion and concerns ▶ Directly address specific misinformation
Local Health Organizations (WHO you should communicate with)	Communication Activities (HOW you can communicate)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Health Departments and Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Realtime data/insights ● Misinformation alerts, downloadable content ● Newsletters

[‡]Medium risk

[§]High risk

Leveraging Partnerships to Mitigate/Minimize Misinformation

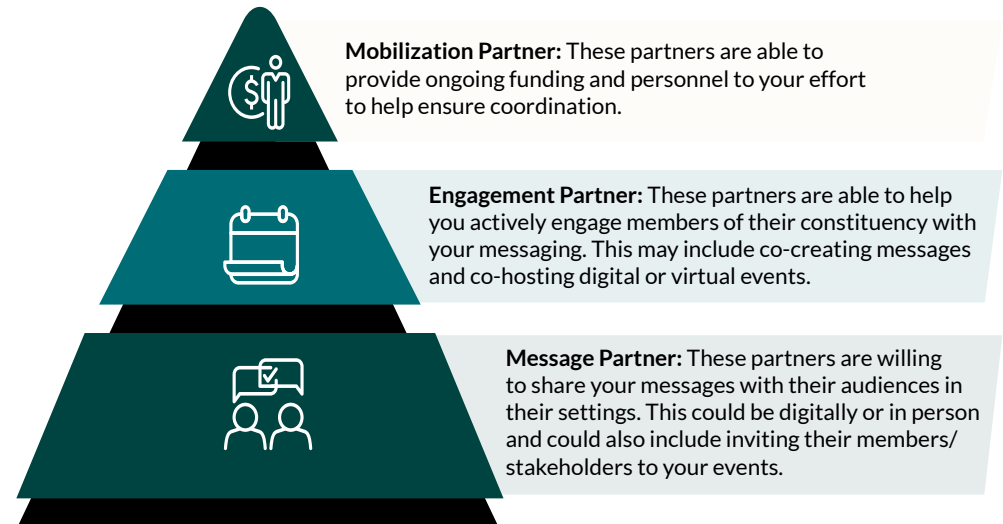
Collaborative partnerships are an invaluable tool to address misinformation. In fact, a successful partnership can offer a number of benefits and help your program accomplish important goals, including keeping track of myths circulating in your area and helping to ensure people have opportunities to act on correct information.



- Build program support and sustainability
- Expand program messaging*
- Expand program reach*
- Share resources, data
- Share health/education needs and concerns
- Obtain buy-in*
- Build credibility*
- Promote cultural sensitivity
- Encourage community dialog
- Build positive brand association*

*Previously discussed in [Section 1- Messaging: How to Brand/Rebrand Your Program](#) and [Section 2 - Misinformation: Navigating Challenges](#).

Partnerships can take many forms and span multiple sectors, but the key elements of any successful partnership are trust, communication, shared values, and mutual respect.



For this resource, we will explore two types of partners:

- **Messaging partners**, or dissemination partners, are foundational to combatting misinformation because they amplify your program messages and expand their reach. These partners are willing to share your messages with their audiences in their settings. This could be digitally or in person and could also include inviting their members/stakeholders to your events. This coordinated approach to message dissemination ultimately helps your program execute several key strategies to mitigate misinformation.

For example, you can partner with your local PTA or school to expand distribution of your program information and materials. You can also partner with local churches to share your program messages and materials through youth-focused ministry activities and/or health fairs.

Benefits of Message Partnership

- Expands program messaging
- Expands program reach
- Increases community buy-in
- Builds credibility
- Establishes positive brand association

Benefits of Engagement Partnership

- **Engagement partners** help leverage and expand your community's strengths and assets.¹⁸ These partners can also elevate your program's concerns and needs by tapping into members of their constituency and broader networks. This may include co-creating messages and co-hosting in-person or virtual events. Together, these partnerships expand your team's capacity to address misinformation.

For example, you can partner with local churches to share your program messages and materials through adult- and youth-focused ministry activities and/or health fairs.

There are a few things to keep in mind when considering a potential partner. These factors are often examined in a SWOT analysis—a strategic planning framework that can be used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of potential or existing partners.

Do they have...

- ✓ a history of stability with strong leadership and effective governance?
- ✓ refined messages over time that resonate with youth?
- ✓ a strong and supportive board and deep community ties?
- ✓ support for messages from parents and other adults?
- ✓ a strong history of partnerships among non-profits in the community?
- ✓ staff that is representative of the communities they serve?
- ✓ programs or services that are culturally sensitive and inclusive?
- ✓ processes in place to address barriers to access that might exist in their community?

Other questions to consider...

- ✓ Is the organization well respected by partners?
- ✓ Has the organization been working in the schools for more than 10 years?
- ✓ Does the organization have a history of youth engagement among non-profits in the community?
- ✓ Does their mission and vision align with ours?



You can learn more about a SWOT analysis in the Community Saturation Toolkit, a how-to-guide that helps youth-serving program providers develop, implement, and sustain a coordinated message strategy in their communities.

Example activities

- Leverage partnerships to
 - Bring together/engage stakeholders to identify common goals that are grounded in the needs and preferences of the community
 - Create a partner advisory board to garner valuable feedback and knowledge about your partners and community
 - Convene multi-stakeholder roundtables about countering misinformation in the community
 - Convene an information-sharing event/forum and include misinformation on the agenda
 - Create a youth council or youth ambassador program to inform key decisions on youth-related topics and issues



As a youth-serving program provider, you know that true success requires many different types of partnerships. Partnerships with youth, parents, teachers, and schools are vital to the work that you do.

Tips for Parents as Partners: Parent and Caregiver Engagement

Most parents and caregivers are interested in the health and well-being of their youth. However, parents experience any number of challenges to staying connected with youth and their community. Here are a few activities to consider when engaging parents and caregivers. See [Resources](#) for helpful tools.

Activity	Description
Focus group/listening sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host focus groups or listening sessions to find out how families and caregivers feel about their interactions with your organization and/or program.
Parent/caregiver planning sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer planning sessions with parents to help them develop strategies to support their children’s success inside/outside the classroom.
Frequent communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find the best way to communicate with parents/caregivers and communicate often. Identify what communication channels are accessible and familiar to the parents/caregivers you serve. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Text messages – Phone calls – Video calls – Social media – Send supplemental materials home with youth – In-person meetings – Live stream parent meetings/sessions or record events and post videos on your website – Newsletters
Education opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify ways to share curricula with parents/caregivers to increase their comfort level with program topics: meet parents and caregivers where they are, allow opportunities to ask questions, consider what events they already attend, present your information through multiple channels. • Develop supplemental materials for parents/caregivers and make them readily available in multiple formats.
School partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with family and parent engagement coordinators in schools. Consider language and communication barriers (schools often have staff to address this).

Activity	Description
Parent/caregiver-focused classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer parent/caregiver-focused classes.
Public and community meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend relevant public meetings to ask parents/caregivers how your organization can support youth in the community.
Program committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite parents/caregivers to participate in program committee meetings. Ask committee participants how your organization can support youth in the community.
Supportive solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify ways to make it easier for youth and parents/caregivers to attend programming events. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide on-site childcare while parents/caregivers attend programs. – Provide food/meals for programming that takes place near dinner time. – Use multiple channels to communicate and deliver programming to parents, communicate with parents and caregivers frequently and use a variety of methods. – Offer transportation solutions and consider public transportation routes when setting up classes. – Invite parents/caregivers to participate at the same time as youth.
Virtual meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for parents, guardians, and caregivers who cannot join in-person meetings.



Looking for additional engagement ideas and activities?

- [Tips for Virtually Engaging Parents & Caregivers During Social Distancing](#)
- [Strategies for Engaging Parents and Caregivers Tip Sheet](#)

Tips for Youth as Partners: Youth Engagement

Youth offer a unique set of experiences, perspectives, ideas and skills that can strengthen program activities and help you better implement a program that is responsive to the needs of youth in your community. Here are a few activities to consider when engaging youth as partners. See [Resources](#) for helpful tools.

Activity	Description
Early Bird/Youth-Centered Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Involve youth in planning activities and program objectives. Youth have valuable ideas and insights that can help strengthen activities.
Engagement Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A youth engagement champion is strongly motivated to support, promote, and develop youth engagement in the organization. Champions are dedicated to working with youth, raising issues that are important to them, and willing to find new ways to work around common challenges when practicing youth engagement. Program alum are model champions who can share their experiences with the program.
Youth Advisory Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a youth advisory board to further incorporate youth voices and lived experience and build capacity of youth participants. Successful youth advisory boards have the following characteristics¹⁹: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Led by youth – Consistent, structured meetings – Community-building activities – Safe space for students/youth – Planning, implementing, and reflecting on meaningful projects
Recruitment Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create materials that describe your program and what is expected of youth. ● Invite youth to bring a friend or mentor, so participation is not as intimidating.
Pre-Engagement Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use pre-engagement or preparatory activities to energize youth and help get them excited for upcoming activities. Examples include video calls with participating youth or fun tasks to be completed before they officially convene.
Reflection Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use reflection activities with youth to hear what they thought about an activity. Example prompts may include : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Did we successfully incorporate your input? – What do we need to do better/what changes are needed?



Community Buy-In Can Help Minimize Misinformation

Community buy-in is critical to the success of most community-based efforts. Community buy-in is an acceptance of or willingness to support or participate in your program and can help you build trust between your program and the community. As a youth-serving program provider, it is important to identify opportunities to engage community members in meaningful communications and activities. By garnering acceptance and support for your program, you will build trust between your program and the community.

Please remember—relationships and trust are built and strengthened over time. Garnering community buy-in is an ongoing process, not a one-time effort. This makes community engagement an even more important endeavor and allows organizations to place quality, accurate, and shareable information into the hands of your community members.

Parents and youth partners are essential participants of community buy-in efforts. That's why it's important to engage parents and youth early and often—ideally *before* challenges arise in your community. Their perspectives, insights, and networks are invaluable. The better and more accurately informed and involved your community is, the more likely they are to trust your program and organization.²⁰

Community engagement is about creating opportunities for communication, education, collaboration, and partnership. It is a way to establish two-way communication through intentional interactions between your program and the community. These interactions will help you better understand your community's needs, concerns, and even complaints.

When done well, community engagement can help put your program on the map (for all the right reasons). It can also serve as a tool to help chip away misperceptions, misinformation, and other social challenges about your program—but remember, it's impossible to make everyone happy. By engaging in meaningful and inclusive activities, you can make sure members in your community have accurate and sharable information about your program.

Common Goals for Community Engagement

- Inform the community about an effort or issue
- Increase visibility for your organization or initiative
- Increase the number of partners and allies that join your effort
- Collaborate with new partners and build trust
- Identify or activate ambassadors and leaders in the community around an issue or effort
- Determine community needs or preferences
- Inform internal strategy or organizational direction
- Create buy-in on a particular strategy or effort

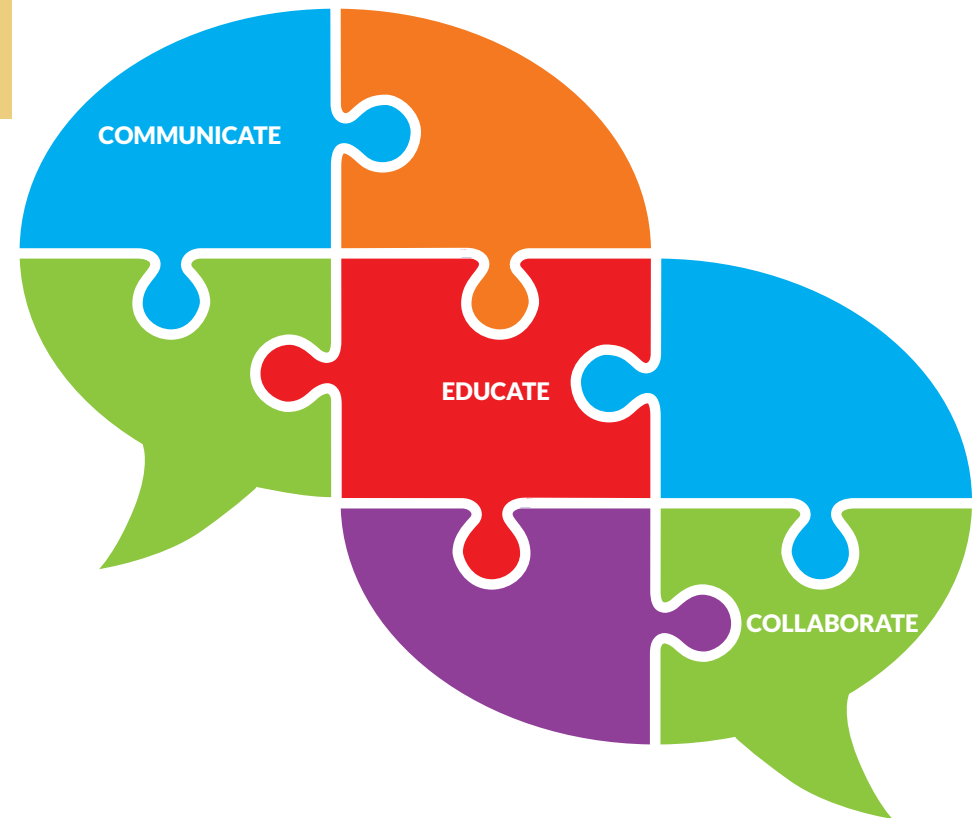


Community Engagement: Let's Communicate, Educate, and Collaborate!

Communicate.

Any community engagement effort is only as good as the communication activities supporting it. In fact, communication is essential to everything that you will do, so before you commit to developing and disseminating messages and materials about your program, take the time to learn about what people in your community are hearing *and* what they are saying—this should sound familiar (see Section 2 Misinformation: Navigating Challenges)! The insights that you'll gain during the “listening phase” of communication will provide an invaluable foundation to your community engagement activities. It will also help you tailor communications about your program to the unique information needs within your community.

The following Communication Principles will guide your community engagement activities to increase program literacy, increase communication and collaboration, and support/advance program implementation. See [Table 2. Community Engagement Pillars](#).



Key Considerations

- All communications must be transparent, useful, and easily accessible through multiple communication channels.
- Identify and vet internal and external ambassadors. These individuals will champion messaging in your community.

Educate.



These activities establish information paths for community members, which means they know where to find information about your program and other key resources in your community.

Key Considerations



- When sharing information with your community, always think about what is important to them.
- Create value and build credibility through reporting, such as via newsletters or social media (promote interesting tweets of accounts mentioning your program's work); share infographics and other visuals that capture achievement; promote staff accomplishments (publications, certifications).

Collaborate.



When you collaborate with your community, you're able to engage in and maintain a direct dialog. It deepens understanding on issues, pain points, and tensions like affordable housing, access to public assistance, violence, and racism. It also builds connection between program staff and individual members—Collaboration Cultivates Community.

Collaborative activities can reach large numbers of people and give program staff a platform to explain key operations and activities. Community members are able to ask direct questions and share feedback in real time. This format is invaluable to your community because it demonstrates an openness and transparency about your program. These activities can happen concurrently with dissemination of messages and materials that are intended to educate and inform the community about your program. Because this is an iterative framework, you'll be able to refine, revise, and even develop new messages and materials as you learn more about your community's concerns.

Workshops and focus groups can allow community members to discuss their ideas in an open and relaxed environment.





Key Considerations

- Meet community members where they are.
- Identify what's important to your community and talk about it.
- Listen to, analyze, and respond to community feedback. Pay attention to the fears or concerns about your program. Identify ways to address the needs or concerns of the community.
- Be well-prepared for potential miscommunication during collaborative sessions. You should also be prepared for all types of questions from participants.

Table 2. Community Engagement Pillars

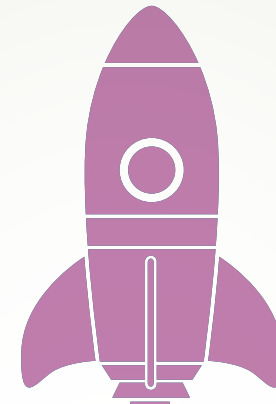
1. Guiding Principles for Communication (Communicate)	2. Educate and Inform (increase program literacy)	
	Topics	Activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program goals, objectives, and accomplishments (includes staff and organizational) • Direct and indirect benefits of program • Youth experience (via testimonial) • Background information/briefings on relevant topics • Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance trends (new!) • 5 Cs of Positive Youth Development (PYD) • PYD and resilience • PYD: family, school, and community • Adulthood Preparation Subjects (APS) - general • APS (expanded outcomes) • Myth busters (myths and realities) • How to recognize misinformation • Future opportunities for engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community newsletters • Parent toolkits • Social clubs and family day • Local events, including school board meetings, PTA meetings, candidate forums, community fairs • School workshops or trainings • Trainings to educate and support educators • Programming to adults for “trusted adults” • Parent/caregiver trainings • Local radio • Op-eds
	3. Collaborate	
Topics	Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be transparent (e.g., about key decisions) • Be honest • Send regular communications/ updates • Use jargon-free language/clear and simple language • Use inclusive language • Use a mix of communication channels • Create accessible formats • Provide alternate language(s) as appropriate • Foster coordinated messaging and dissemination (include partner organizations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What’s important to your community members? • What community assets do youth need (what’s needed to support youth) • Number of youth that go to college or trade school • What community assets do parents/ caregivers/guardians need (what’s needed to support parents) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community mapping • Public meetings • Workshops and focus groups (e.g., adult, parent, youth) • Forums • Web-based engagement • Community advisory committees • Community coalitions • Online discussion forums 	

SECTION 3

DISSEMINATION: PRESENTING YOUR PROGRAM TO THE COMMUNITY

How to Disseminate Program Messages

Dissemination is a dynamic process of sharing information with members of your community, stakeholders, and wider audiences. It's where all your hard work comes together. A dissemination strategy ensures key messages and other important information from your program reach the *right* members of your community. The timely delivery of well-crafted messages can help shift narratives and neutralize misinformation.





Most dissemination efforts begin with an action plan or dissemination plan which helps you accomplish the following.



- Define your audience
 - Who is your target audience? Who needs to hear your message(s)?
- Determine what message you want to share
 - What key information or messages are most important to your audience(s)?
- Identify the best dissemination product for the message (e.g., newsletter, podcast, social media post)
 - How can your target audience best learn about your message(s)?
 - What type of dissemination product will you create?
- Determine the best dissemination channel for the message
 - What is the most effective way to share your messages?
- Identify the best time to share your messages

If you've already completed your messaging prep ([Section 1: How to Brand/Rebrand Your Program](#)), then you're a few steps ahead! You've already worked through who you want to reach (audience) and what you want to say (message). Next, you must determine the best dissemination product for your message. In the event that your messages are developed in response to misinformation, the dissemination product and channel will be predetermined (remember—if you encounter misinformation on a platform or channel *and* decide to address it, your response [message] should be communicated on the same channel).

Infographic 1. Dissemination Products

This infographic offers example dissemination products to share program information and materials.






Channels	Products	
Social Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • X, formerly known as Twitter post • Facebook post • YouTube video 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instagram post • LinkedIn post • Snapchat video
New Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web content • Email newsletters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Podcasts • Blogs
News Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op-eds • Press releases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local/community news • Radio
Newsletters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community newsletters • Partner and Stakeholder newsletters 	
	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact or Tip Sheet • Infographic • Promotional products and giveaways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Stickers, magnets, notepads, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy/Issue briefs • Poster • White paper or reports • PowerPoints/slides

Figure 1. Action Planning Tool for Dissemination

The following action planning tool offers guidance to help you and your organization develop a dissemination plan.

Dissemination Goal	
Target Audience	
Key Message(s) to Share	
<p>What dissemination products will be most effective at targeting your audience and sharing your message?</p> <p>Choose which you will use: (e.g., podcast, newsletter, op-ed, infographic)</p> <p>See Dissemination Infographic for a complete list.</p>	
Final Product	
<p>Who should share/deliver/promote the product?</p> <p>Remember to identify messengers for each product.</p>	
<p>How will your final product be shared?</p> <p>See Dissemination Infographic for a list of examples.</p>	
<p>When will you share the final product(s)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there specific dates or events that are relevant to the topic or audience? • Where will your final product(s) be shared (e.g., school board meetings, community health fairs, open house)? 	

Evaluation

It is important to regularly review and analyze activities from your communications strategy to assess the success of your efforts. Insights from your reach and engagement measures will help inform and refine future activities. It will also help you identify gaps in existing efforts that future communications should address.

Measure of Reach and Engagement Activities

► **Activity: Leverage Existing Communication Channels**

📣 Reach Measures

- Number of channels in which messages are included (i.e., number of partners' newsletters)
- Number of users who subscribe to/receive that communication channel
- Number of times different messages are included in different channels
- Number of links to your website/message (inbound links)

👍 Engagement Measures

- Feedback from partners and users
- Evidence of visible action taken; for example, if a call to action in an advertisement is to attend a subsequent meeting, number of people attending the meeting could be counted as engagement





► **Activity: Develop New, Direct Communication Channels**

📣 Reach Measures

- Feedback from partners and users
- Number and type of new, direct channels developed
- Number of messages included in the channels
- Number of users who subscribe to/receive each communication channel (for context)

👍 Engagement Measures

- Response received from recipients
 - For a newsletter, this may include an inquiry; for posters in the school, this may include a parent emailing or calling to request more information
- Response to specific calls to action
- Subscribers gained on new communication channels (the number of new people who have signed up to receive your direct communication)

► **Activity: Attend Community Meetings**

📣 Reach Measures

- Number and name of community meetings attended
- Messages shared at community meetings
- Number of new partners/individuals (including parents or community members) recruited to join the effort at community meetings

👍 Engagement Measures

- Comments received at community meetings in response to messages shared
- Requests for additional information or presentations on topic/content at future meetings





► **Activity: Conduct a Workshop or Parent-Focused Class**

📣 Reach Measures

- Number of workshops/classes at which messages were shared
- Number of participants

👍 Engagement Measures

- Requests for additional information after the training
- Requests for additional partnership opportunities after the workshop

► **Activity: Develop Ongoing Relationships with Journalists and News Outlets**

📣 Reach Measures

- Number of relationships with journalists/news outlets, measured by personal contact information for an individual (e.g., LinkedIn connections, number of collected business cards, direct follow-up, and responses) and number of articles published that include quotes or expert mentions from your organization

👍 Engagement Measures

- Quality of relationships with news outlets, measured by whether your messaging is included in the coverage and whether news outlets call your organization or partners for comments
- Increased traffic to program website
- Number of mentions in news outlets



Using a tool like [Google News Alerts](#) can monitor mentions of your content on the internet.

► **Activity: Use Social Media to Communicate, Educate, and Engage the Community**

📣 Reach Measures

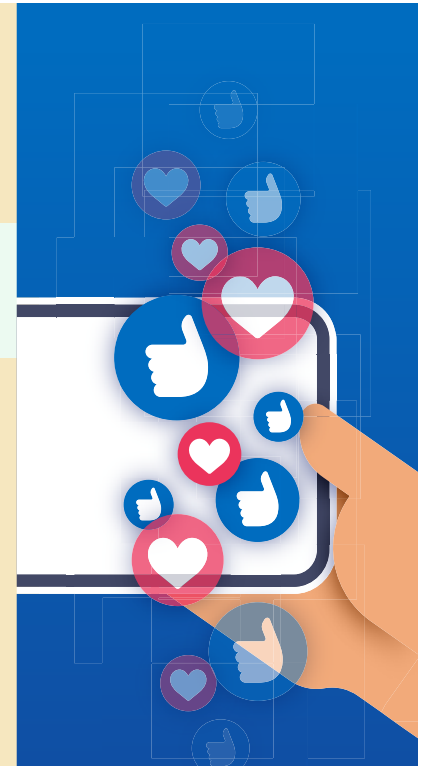
- Number of impressions (i.e., the number of times the content shared was viewed by others)



Unless impressions are reported as unique, they might include multiple exposures for the same person.

👍 Engagement Measures

- Engagement rate (the number of times someone likes/favorites/shares/reposts or comments/replies on a social media post)
- Conversation rate (number of times your topic or brand/hashtag is mentioned in a social media post)
 - 💡 *Conversation Rate = # of Audience Comments (or Replies) Per Post*
- Click-through Rate or CTR (number of click-throughs to a website; if that is a call to action)



► **Activity: Conduct Community Meetings**

📣 Reach Measures

- Number of community meetings hosted
- Number of attendees
- Number of attendees compared to previous attendance

👍 Engagement Measures

- Requests for additional information after meeting
- Requests for additional partnership opportunities after meeting
- Comments/evaluation from meeting
- References to the meeting in media or other forums





► Activity: Use Paid Advertising

📣 Reach Measures

- Impressions of paid advertising or number of people reached (measured by advertising platform)

👍 Engagement Measures



- Brand/message search term usage (increases)



Brand/message usage can be measured online using tools like Google Analytics or Google Search Console.



Tools to Monitor Message Reach and Engagement

- [Google Analytics](#)  provides information about website traffic.
- [Good Trends](#)  can track what people are searching for on the internet.
- [Social Media Metrics for Federal Agencies](#) (a blog) provides additional information on the importance of social media metrics and which might be most helpful to track and monitor.

Resources

The following is a list of resources on a number of the topics covered in this document. These resources are provided to support your efforts to expand community buy-in, increase parent engagement, and disrupt misinformation in your community.

Messaging




- [CDC Clear Communication Index](#)
- [AHRQ Publishing and Communications Guidelines](#)
- [Making Health Communication Programs Work](#)
- [CDC Resources on Health Communication](#)
- [Social Media Toolkit: Creating One for Your Organization](#) ↗
- [To Catalyze System Change, Become a Better Casemaker](#) ↗
- [How to Create Community Member Personas](#) ↗
- [Reframing Adolescence and Adolescent Development](#) ↗
- [State Personas](#)
- [Parent Persona Postcards](#)

Dissemination


- [Social Media Toolkit](#)
- [Social Media Strategy Tool](#)
- [Quick Start Guide to Dissemination for Practice-Based Research Networks](#)
- [6 Free Social Listening Tools for a Booming 2024 Online Presence](#) ↗

Misinformation

- [Misinformation and Public Health: Implications for Personal Responsibility Education Program \(PREP\) Grantees](#)
- [Community Engagement to Tackle Misinformation about Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention](#)
- [Building Brand Identity to Mitigate Misinformation and Connect with Audiences](#)
- [How to Help Patients Who Encounter Misinformation](#) ↗
- [A Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation](#)

- [Public Health and Online Misinformation: Challenges and Recommendations](#) 
- [Psychological Inoculation Improves Resilience Against Misinformation on Social Media](#) 
- [Vaccine Misinformation Management Field Guide](#) 
- [Confronting Health Misinformation \(HHS\)](#)
- [What COVID-19 Misinformation Says About All of Us](#) 
- [A Guide to Prebunking: A Promising Way to Inoculate Against Misinformation](#) 
- [A Practical Guide to Prebunking Misinformation](#) 
- [2022 Misinformation Grant Program Winners](#) 

Parent, Child, and Partner Engagement

- [Tips and Strategies for Increasing Parent and Family Involvement in Virginia Schools](#) 

Evaluation

- [Continuous Quality Improvement Tip Sheet](#)

Positive Youth Development

- [Building on Strengths: the Role of Positive Youth Development in Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programming](#)
- [Positive Youth Development Approach](#)
- [Integrating Positive Youth Development in PREP Programming](#)

Adulthood Preparation Subjects

- [APS Resource Guide](#)
- [Integrating Financial Literacy into Your APP Program](#)
- [Strategies for Addressing Financial Literacy](#)
- [Healthy Relationships: Assess, Improve, Take Action](#)
- [Innovative Strategies for APS: Adolescent Development, Health Relationships, & Parent-Child Communication](#)
- [Adolescent Self-Regulation](#)
- [Parent-Child Communication](#)
- [Adulthood Preparation Subjects Conceptual Models](#)

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This resource was created by the *We Think Twice*[™] campaign with support from the Family and Youth Services Bureau. It is one of several valuable resources designed for youth-serving professionals. It is intended to encourage positive youth development by strengthening community support for prevention education and other youth development programs.



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