

WANT COMMUNICATION HELP?

Training on Strategic Approaches for Communication, Engagement, & Building Trust

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FOLLOW UP: Responses to Session Questions

These materials are for advisory purposes only.
They are not guarantees of what will work or be a fit for specific situations.



NORTHEAST REGIONAL CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES
TRAINING & EVALUATION CENTER

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 1:

SESSION TOPIC:

Fundamentals of (Strategic) Public Health Communication

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QUESTION:

Are there examples for each of the strategies [in the Stages of Change model]?

Response:

- A systematic review by Vale and Ortega (2020) provide examples of interventional studies applying the Stages of Change (Transtheoretical) Model, with examples of strategies and outcomes for targeted stages.
 - Vega C, Ortega C. 2020. Adoption of Change: A Systematic Review of the Transtheoretical Model. *Sports and Exercise Medicine*. 6(1).
<https://openventio.us/index.php/SEM/article/view/966>
- The book *Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Disorder Treatment: Updated 2019* provides an overview of each stage in the Stages of Change model, with recommendations and examples of how to support engagement and transition from one stage to the next.
 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Use Disorder Treatment. Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series No. 35. SAMHSA Publication No. PEP19-02-01-003. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK571071/>

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 1:

QUESTION:

When preparing to have a social media presence, if you anticipate your audience to have low health literacy, how would you recommend beginning those accounts?

Response:

Here is a table of options that can help you think through best practices.

Goal	What to do	Examples / Tips
Use plain language	Choose simple, everyday words Avoid jargon	Say “stop mosquito bites” instead of “reduce vector exposure”
Focu on one message	Limit each post to one key idea	Create a series if you have multiple points
Use clear, helpful visuals	Use icons, photos, simple drawings, or short videos	Step-by-step images showing how to apply repellent
Make actions specific	Provide concrete, do-able steps	Say “dump standing water every week” instead of “reduce breeding sites”
Repeat key messages	Reinforce the same point in different formats	Weekly reminders, reels, stories, infographics
Be culturally relevant	Use local examples, relatable imagery, community voices	Feature community members demonstrating behaviors
Ensure readable design	High contrast, large fonts, minimal text on images	Dark text on light background 16-18pt font equivalent
Use simple, direct titles	Make the main point obvious at a glance	“3 Ways to Protect Your Family Today”
Engage with questions	Ask easy, specific questions to involve your audience	“Have you checked for standing water this week?”
Use Audio / Voiceovers	Add voice explanations for those who prefer listening	Short clips explaining steps with captions included

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 1:

QUESTION:

What is the best way to facilitate feedback [on social media] if you anticipate a lot of it, at least in the beginning, to be negative?

Response:

Here is a list of resources that may be useful to reference.

- Forbes Expert Panel, [12 Tips for Responding to Negative Feedback on Social Media](#)
- Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, [Adapting Public Health Messages for Social Media: Tips You Can Use With Your Communities](#)
- Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, [13 Tips for Establishing and Building Trust Around Health Content, from Top Social Media Creators](#)
- Region IV Public Health Training Center, [Introduction to Using Social Media](#)

Here is a template for example responses:

Response	Template
General acknowledgement of concern	Thank you for sharing your concerns with us. We're sorry to hear about your experience. We take feedback seriously and want to understand more so we can help. Please send us a direct message so we can talk privately and look into this further.
Correcting misinformation	To help keep everyone informed, here is accurate information from trusted public health sources. If you have more questions, feel free to message us anytime.
De-escalating emotional comments	We hear your frustration, and we're here to help. Your concerns matter to us. Please message us directly so we can support you safely and privately.
Private protection reminder	Thank you for reaching out. To protect your privacy, we can't discuss personal health details here. Please message us or contact us at the listed phone/email so we can assist privately.
Table continued on next page	

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 1:

Response	Template
Service delay or operational issue	Thank you for letting us know. We're sorry for the inconvenience. Our team is reviewing the issue to improve services. Please message us if you'd like to share more details.
Acknowledging valid feedback	Thank you for your honest feedback. You're raising an important point, and we're sharing it with our team. We'd welcome additional details via direct message.
Harrassment / abuse warning	We cannot allow abusive or disrespectful comments on our page. We welcome constructive conversation. Continued violations may lead to restricted access.
Redirecting to official resources	Thanks for your question. For the most accurate information, please visit the official link provided. Message us if you have additional questions.
Addressing shared misinformation	Thanks for sharing this. Some information online can be confusing. Here is the correct guidance based on current public health recommendations.
Closing the loop	We appreciate your engagement. We've shared the most accurate info available. Please reach out privately if you'd like to continue the conversation.

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 1:

QUESTION:

You mentioned two different models [Health Belief Model, Stages of Change Model]. How would one choose which model to use and strategies for their audience?

Response:

It makes the most sense to **combine key topics from both models**, unless you know for certain that aspects of one model do not apply.

QUESTION:

Are there additional steps/considerations you would take for messaging targeting a completely naive audience (i.e., international tourists visiting your jurisdiction due to a sporting event)?

Response:

- Think about partners who can help make connections with that audience and help you get the message in front of them. Also think about what would make this audience care about the issue, paired with easy actions they can take.
- Other important considerations include:
 - Being very clear on the severity and likelihood of the threat (to help decide how much energy to put into a communication campaign).
 - Figuring out how to get the messages in front of the audience since they are not likely looking for information - connecting with local and regional tourism boards and the sporting entities supporting the visitors would be key.
 - Understanding how unfamiliar the audience is (i.e., do they have this disease / vector at home?) as there might need to be additional clarification if these things are unfamiliar to them.
 - Prioritizing the top 1 to 3 actions they should take to stay safe.

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 1:

QUESTION:

Do you have any suggestions about how to determine what Stage of Change an audience is in to better tailor messaging? I'm interested in both survey tools, but also an in-person event (e.g., state fair booth) to help tailor messages on the spot.

Response:

There are formal and informal ways to go about this.

For a more informal option, you could ask:

- **Have you ever thought about avoiding tick bites before?**
 - If the answer is **no**, then they are in **Precontemplation**.
 - If the answer is **yes**, you can ask if they **have taken any action**.

These answers should then give you a good sense if they are in Contemplation, have moved toward Preparation, or are already in Action mode.

If they share they have taken protective steps, you can ask how regularly to see if they are in Maintenance mode.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- DeBeaumont Foundation Training Opportunities
 - <https://debeaumont.org/training/>
- Public Health Communications Collaborative Academy
 - <https://academy.publichealthcollaborative.org/>
- National Association of County and City Health Officials, Social Media Toolkit 2021
 - <https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Communications/NACCHO-Social-Media-Toolkit-2021.pdf>
- National Association of County and City Health Officials, Communications Planning Guide 2024
 - <https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Communications-Planning-Guide.pdf>

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 2:

SESSION TOPIC:

Building Trusting Relationships with your Community

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QUESTION:

Is the Edelman 2025 report just USA or global?

Response:

This is a global report. The health-focused one from 2025 (referenced in today's session) involves 9 countries, according to the website.

- 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer: Special Report - Trust and Health,
<https://www.edelman.com/trust/2025/trust-barometer/special-report-health>

QUESTION:

Are there specific message types where hard or soft traits are more effective? Anecdotally, I would think when conveying an emergency message, hard traits would be more effective.

Response:

We are sharing a summary of recommendations from the *Messengers* book mentioned during the session.

Martin S, Marks J. 2019. *Messengers: Who We Listen To, Who We Don't, and Why*. Public Affairs. ISBN-10: 1541724380.

Brief Summary:

https://www.messengersthebook.com/uploads/files/pdfs/messengers_beguide.pdf

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 2:

Please note: the below recommendation summaries were developed using AI [bookshelf.ai]

I. SITUATIONS REQUIRING AUTHORITY OR CONTROL

Hard messengers perform best when people expect the messenger to **take charge, give direction, or impose structure.**

Examples:

- Organizational crisis leadership
- Safety compliance instruction
- Public health emergencies requiring rapid behavior change
- Military, policing, or emergency response settings

Why it works:

- High-status or dominant messengers are perceived as **legitimate authority figures**, and people defer to them automatically.

II. WHEN EXPERTISE OR COMPETENCE SIGNALS MATTER MOST

When the audience wants someone who **knows what they are talking about**, competence-based hard traits dominate.

Examples:

- Scientific guidance
- Technical briefings
- Medical instructions (e.g., white coat effect)
- Legal or financial advise

Why it works:

- Research shows format credentials (e.g., titles, professional attire, affiliations) cause audiences to **assign greater weight to the message**, regardless of content accuracy.

QUESTIONS FROM SESSION 2:

Please note: the below recommendation summaries were developed using AI [bookshelf.ai]

III. COMPETITIVE OR ZERO-SUM ENVIRONMENTS

Hard messenger traits matter in situations framed as **competitive, resource-limited, or winner-take-all**.

Examples:

- Hiring decisions
- Negotiations
- Political debates
- Leadership races

Why it works:

- Audiences associate dominance and status with winning capacity and resource acquisition.

IV. WHEN SOCIAL STATUS SIGNALS INFLUENTIAL DECISIONS

Status cues - like wealth, luxury signals, physical displays of confidence, and elite affiliations - amplify persuasion.

Examples:

- Fundraising
- High-level corporate influence
- Persuasion in elite networks

Why it works:

- Status cues unconsciously trigger deference, e.g., people hesitate longer before honking at luxury cars, tip more when servers wear luxury accessories.