

2011

# Communications & Working with Media

Leadership Development Modules  
Modules complimenting the New AIDS Director Orientation Guide



# COMMUNICATIONS

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AIDS directors must be able to communicate effectively with a broad range of stakeholders and public health professionals. They must be able to communicate within the health department, both up to the administrators and down to their program staff. In essence, the AIDS director is the lynchpin for communicating about state HIV/AIDS programs. One aspect of communication that is particularly critical is being able to effectively use and manage the media. A second aspect is to

ensure a certain level of cross-cultural competence, both for yourself and your staff. The AIDS epidemic disproportionately impacts racial/ethnic communities, and transmission remains a concern for men who have sex with men/gay men and injection drug users. There are specific ways that any community functions, interacts and relates, so understanding and being able to communicate across cultures, be they racial/ethnic, based on sexual orientation, or behavior, is important.

## Core Competencies - Communication Skills

- Communicates effectively both in writing and orally, or in other ways
- Solicits input from individuals and organizations
- Advocates for public health programs and resources
- Leads and participates in groups to address specific issues
- Uses the media, advanced technologies, and community networks to communicate information
- Effectively presents accurate demographic, statistical, programmatic, and scientific information for professional and lay audiences

Link to the [Toolkit on Core Competencies](#)

## Basics of Communications

There are many different typologies for communication, or that give clues to communication styles based on personality types (e.g. [Myers-Briggs](#) or [Keirsey](#)). However, a common theme for all of these typologies is that an understanding of type can build bridges of understanding and improve communication.

An important point to recognize is that while most of these typologies say that there are no inherently better or worse types, different groups – cultures, communities, professions or organizations actually do value some

types more than others. For example, one culture or group may value directness and another may find direct words and body language rude. Another way to think about this is to consider the concept of **high and low context** and its impact on communication. Championed by Edward Hall, this makes the distinction between people in high-context environments, where people have such close connections that many codes for communication are implicit or unstated. In this paradigm, high context is compared to low context environments, which include many connections that are more short-term or transient and require more explicit explanations of communication and behavior. (For more information, visit <http://www.culture-at-work.com/highlow.html>).

#### **Traits of Effective Communicators**

- Patient
- Knowledgeable
- Clear Speaking
- Observant
- Prepared
- Flexible
- Aware of body language
- Non-judgmental

#### **Communication skills**

- Use of humor
- Active-listening
- Eye Contact
- Questioning
- Tone
- Pace

**Four Key Elements of Presenting:** A strategy for effective presentation and communication –

1. Know your audience
2. Know your content
3. Prepare and practice your delivery
4. Ensure an appropriate environment for delivery of your message

#### **Be Aware of the “Power Shadow”**

In positions of leadership, it is important to understand that people have specific perceptions of your position.

- Power and authority come with a “shadow.” People have an expectation about the exercise of power and authority, and it is often negative.
- These expectations may be based on very real histories of trauma and oppression.
- Skillful leaders know how to deal with this “power shadow” without relinquishing authority, being manipulative, or letting it get out of control.

More on power, leadership and communication can be found at: [Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership: Casting Light or Shadow, Fourth Edition](#), by Craig E. Johnson. Sage Publications, February 2011.

## ***Working with the Media***

### **Where to Start?**

As an AIDS director, you'll find that it is important to have a programmatic strategy for working with the media. You can use the media to promote public health, enhance a program, and/or increase HIV/AIDS awareness.

The most important advice about working with the media is to avoid getting caught off guard. The best time to establish a relationship is off camera by exchanging information before a crisis ever occurs. A good strategy is to establish your credibility by being available to the media.

However, it is important to know your health department's policy regarding the media. You can verify with your department's communications people to be certain you can interact with the media.

Once you know your health department's policy, the next step is getting to know your local media. It is always good to

### **Where Do Most People Get their News?**

- Audiences turning more toward the web
- Less dominance by mainstream media
- Rise of news aggregators (e.g. Yahoo) and specialty media (e.g. WebMD)
- Social Networking Media

### **Types of media**

- **Newspapers**
- **News magazines**
- **Television**
- **Radio**
- **Cable**
- **The Web**
- **Text messaging, blogs, virtual worlds**

research and know what the local media scene is. You can create a list to keep by your desk with reporters' names, station IDs, faxes, etc. Some of your colleagues have found a Media Encounter Sheet useful to cover all the bases. Do not CRY WOLF or contrive a story just to get in the news. Remember it's a seasonal business – but also remember the annual events that trigger stories.

You must understand that media is a business. A reporter is not out to make you look bad with hostile questions, nor are they out to make you look good; a reporter is simply trying to get a story. Thus, understanding a reporter's job is critical. Reporters usually always work with deadlines and need "it" quickly but also have a code of ethics that require them to report accurately, and objectively. You should also be prepared for follow up questions after the interview. And, make sure that you ask them how they are using the information.

There are several kinds of media to consider when proactively creating a story. These include Public Services Announcements, a media library, distribution lists for department newsletters, press releases (especially for events), paid advertisements and op-ed pieces.

**First Step Is Being Proactive: Create a SOCCHO**

A useful concept when thinking about your communication strategy is to know what your **Single Overriding Health Communication Objective (SOHCO)** is. This is your main point or objective or the theme of

the interview, and even if they approached you, you need to understand what your SOHCO focus will be and you need to be prepared with facts.

**Second: Know your local media**

- Create your own media world and keep it updated: know the local media scene
- Identify journalists and maintain their contact information
- Use Tools
- Work with your department's communications people
- Be sure you can interact with the media...in some health departments you're not allowed

## MEDIA ENCOUNTER FORM

**DATE:**

**NAME OF MEDIA CONTACT:**

**CONTACT INFO:**

**CONTACT INITIATED BY:**

**FORMAT:**

- NEWSPAPER
- RADIO
- TV
- INTERNET
- OTHER

**PURPOSE OF CONTACT:**

**SINGLE OVERRIDING HEALTH COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVE(S):**

# ***MAKING THE MOST OF AN INTERVIEW***



## *Before the Interview*

- ❑ Pick the SOHCOs/Focus
- ❑ Note deadline
- ❑ Get facts on who is interviewing you/what station or newspaper/what audience
- ❑ Set your agenda
- ❑ Anticipate questions and rehearse them
- ❑ Be informed about local and national events that could impact this story
- ❑ Be prepared and have brief information for the reporter : e.g., a fact sheet from the Epidemiologic Report in your district, rather than the entire report
- ❑ Look in the mirror/be and dress professionally (you are representing the department of health)

## *During the Interview*

- ❑ Lead the reporter with your conclusions, try not to be led
- ❑ Talk conversationally, not as a reporter
- ❑ Bring the message home/short answers work best
- ❑ Turn the negatives into positives
- ❑ Be human, honest and sincere: Tell the truth
- ❑ Repeat the message as much as you can
- ❑ DO NOT GO OFF RECORD
- ❑ Avoid saying NO COMMENT
- ❑ Remember you are the public health expert




## **WAYS TO SAY “NO COMMENT”**

- That’s all I’m able to say on this matter.
- I wouldn’t want to make any determinations on that.
- There are numerous considerations that factor into our decision. It’s too soon to talk about it.
- You know there are reasons that we can’t share this information right now.
- At this time, we’re not able to share anything more.
- That’s all the detail I can go into right now.
- We’re looking at all aspects of this issue and we haven’t come to any conclusions.
- There are a number of ways to think about this issue. I’ve already told you what I think.
- I wouldn’t want to comment on what others are saying until I find out more information.



## New Media

People of all ages and background are online and using new media tools.



# What is New Media?

- *New Media* is interactive forms of communication that use the Internet, including social networks, text messaging, blogs, virtual worlds and more.
- You control the message



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## New Media, Defined

- **Social network** sites are online communities that allow you to connect with, or provide resources to, clients, colleagues, family, and friends. Many social network sites allow you to upload videos, photos, create a blog, post events, join groups, and send messages.
- **Social bookmarking** is a way to store, organize, and search websites. You can save links to (or “bookmark”) web pages that you want to remember and/or share. These bookmarks are usually public, but you can choose to save them privately and share them only with specific people, groups, and networks.
- **Text messaging**, or Short Message Service (SMS), allows you to send short messages from mobile phones or personal digital assistants (PDAs). Text messages are limited to 160 characters or fewer, including spaces.

- A **blog** (a combination of the words “web” and “log”) is a regularly updated website that typically combine text, images (graphics or video), and links to other websites. Blogs are often informal-taking on the tone of a diary or journal. Some blogs are personal, while others provide news updates.
- A **webcast** is a way of broadcasting over the Internet. A **webcast** may either be distributed live or recorded, and may be one-way or conversational. **Web Conferences** are used to conduct live meetings or presentation over the Internet. In a web conference, you can sit at your computer and can connect to the other participants via Internet. A webinar is a specific type of web conference. It is typically one-way, from the speaker to the audience.
- **Podcasts** (a combination of the terms “iPod” and “broadcast”) are audio or video files that you can listen to or watch on your computer or on a variety of portable media devices.
- **Twitter** allows you to share information, ask questions, and connect with people around common interests. You use your computer or mobile phone to send short messages, or “tweets,” that are limited to 140 characters.

### ***Important Considerations When Using New Media***

- Define your Audience’s Needs: Consider the accessibility of web and other formats, new versus existing users, new media formats and tools, internal capacity and resources, etc.
- Develop a new media plan, including objectives and implementation strategy
- Ensure evaluation: what does the strategy do well? What could it do better? Is the intended audience(s) using your new media tool?

#### **Mapping Out a New Media Strategy**

- Define target audience
- Outline objectives
- Ensure integration and involvement of stakeholders
- Track and respond to culture change
- Ensure or develop capacity
- Identify and obtain tools & specify tactics
- Use mantra, “Create once, reuse often”
- Ensure strategy uses appropriate technology

## Advice from the Field

### Techniques for Effective Communication

- 1) First, be certain what the story is about.
- 2) Use a form or sheet to record information.
- 3) Determine what your role is...To inform the public? To tell your side of the story? To give good news about what your agency is doing on an issue?
- 4) Identify your Single Overriding Health Communication Objective (SOHCO).

### THE ABC'S OF WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

A-- ANYTHING you say may end up on the front page or the evening news

A -- As you ANSWER the question, remember your message

B -- Be BRIEF

C -- COMMUNICATE your message CLEARLY

D -- DON'T be DEFENSIVE

F -- FINALLY...always get the FACTS straight

ALSO:

- The world of technology is ever-changing: What's "hot" today will be outdated soon enough.
- In order to stay in touch with your audience, you need to be flexible, interactive, and fresh.
- Go where your audience is, rather than asking them to come to you. Follow the trends, while keeping your information current, accurate, and accessible.
- Use each form of technology for what it can do best.
- Engage your audience in the design, implementation, and evaluation of your technology efforts.
- New media and technology is here to stay. While it will never replace human interaction and intimacy, the power of the digital world to reach large numbers of people cannot be underestimated.