








Welcome to the MassTAPP
COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

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Welcome to the MassTAPP Communications Toolkit

Introduction

We live in a world where we are bombarded with media and messages *all the time*. From the Facebook feed we check while the coffee is brewing, to the radio station we tune in to on the way to work, to the billboards we read as we drive down the highway . . . someone or something is always trying to catch our attention.

In this time of excessive media, how do you make your voice heard? How does a public health agency or mission-driven organization deliver its message to the public? How does a small prevention coalition get people to listen and learn?

The MassTAPP Communications Toolkit draws from public health and social marketing concepts to empower you to create an effective communications campaign—one that will cut through all the noise and ultimately lead to healthier, stronger communities.

The toolkit contains online, interactive activities and corresponding worksheets, which are designed to help you and your fellow community or coalition members customize and practice some of the key concepts that create successful communications.



While substance misuse prevention goals are rooted in the needs of public health, the materials in this toolkit are drawn from the field of social marketing. Essentially, social marketing applies the principles and techniques of consumer marketing to promoting ideas, attitudes, and behaviors that will benefit society. Social marketing is related to consumer marketing in that both seek to compel an audience to act—whether it's to buy a brand new TV (consumer marketing) or to eat more fruits and veggies (social marketing).

You have important ideas to communicate. By combining the ABCs of social marketing with a public health approach, this resource will give you the tools and skills to share clear, effective, and powerful messages that stand out from others and that “stick” with your audience. In terms of substance abuse and misuse prevention, effective messaging is all about improving—and even saving—lives.

This toolkit is divided into five sections:

1. Analyzing Your Situation
2. Identifying and Understanding Your Audience
3. Developing Your Message
4. Creating and Implementing a Communications Strategy
5. Evaluating Your Communications Campaign

While we recommend that you complete the sections in chronological order, you are free to use this toolkit in the way that best meets your coalition's needs. The toolkit is also designed to be used not just in a single sitting but as a long-term resource that you can return to again and again as your coalition continues its critical prevention work.

We hope you find the toolkit to be helpful in clarifying and implementing your coalition's communications efforts. We appreciate the essential work you do in trying to keep your community healthy and safe.



Analyzing Your Situation

Part 1: Analyzing Your Situation

This section of the toolkit can help you identify and analyze how a communications campaign can best support your coalition's goals and prevention strategies.

It may seem obvious, but the first step in planning a communications campaign is to identify a prevention strategy or goal that can be supported or enhanced through communications. More often than you may think, organizations and coalitions forget this crucial step. It's like taking a road trip without a map or a GPS and then wondering why you didn't end up at the Grand Canyon. If you take the time to identify where you want to go, then your map or GPS can get you there. The same goes for communications planning: If you identify a strategy or goal from your strategic plan that you want to support with communications, then your communications plan will guide you to your desired outcome.

A solid communications plan incorporates three things:

1. An understanding of the challenges facing your community
2. An analysis of your coalition's resources (expertise, funding, connections, etc.)
3. A clear understanding of how communications efforts might support and align with your strategic prevention plan

On your mark. Analyze the problem.

Before you move forward, you'll need to pinpoint the issue or problem that you want to address through your communications campaign. If you've gone through a strategic planning process and developed a logic model, then you've already analyzed a problem and identified strategies that you will implement in order to achieve your outcomes. Some of these strategies already involve communications—and nearly all of them can be supported by communications effort or tactics.

- ⇒ If you have *not* already developed a logic model, MassTAPP's "Develop a Logic Model" can guide you through the process: <http://masstapp.edc.org/step-3-strategic-planning/task-5-develop-logic-model>



Analyzing Your Situation

When analyzing the problem that your community faces, consider the following questions:

- Who is affected by this issue or problem?
- Why is this group affected by this problem?
- What can be done to lessen, prevent, or solve this problem?
- How can your coalition contribute to a solution—specifically, through a communications campaign?

Get set. Analyze your coalition's capacity.

Before you launch a communications campaign, consider your own coalition's capacities. Take stock of your resources:

- Budget
- Staff
- Time
- Technology
- Community partnerships

By reflecting honestly on your coalition's existing skills and resources, you can set realistic expectations for your communications campaign. Match your coalition's capacity with the scope of your communications efforts.

Go! Align your communications campaign with your program strategy.

Take time to consider whether the strategies you have identified to achieve the desired outcomes of your substance abuse/misuse prevention initiative can be supported by communications tactics. For example, if one of your prevention strategies is to raise awareness among parents about the dangerous consequences of hosting underage parties, then a communications campaign could complement and strengthen that strategy. By educating community members about the legal implications of serving teenagers alcohol at home, communications—through the radio, social media, or town hall meetings—could take you one (or two or three!) steps closer to reaching your overall program goals.



Analyzing Your Situation

Below are some other examples of how the strategies identified in a logic model can be supported by communications.

Problem to be addressed: Misuse/abuse of opioids						
Local manifestation of the problem: 7.43% of local high school students in grades 9–12 report past-30-day misuse of prescription opioids						
Intervening Variables	Strategy	Target Group	Outputs	Outcomes		
				Short-Term	Intermediate	Long-Term
Access to prescription pain medication	Campaign to increase safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription drugs	Parents or grandparents of school-age youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of advertisements ▪ Number of publicity events ▪ Number of PSAs 	Increased number of adults with information on safe use, storage, and disposal of prescription drugs	Decreased access to prescription pain medication in the home	Decreased rates of past-30-day prescription drug misuse among 13–17 year olds

Communications could support this strategy in the following ways:

- Publicize prescription take-back days in the community
- Publicize the availability of Rx drop boxes in police stations
- Develop PSAs targeted at parents

Problem to be addressed: Underage drinking and other drug use						
Local manifestation of the problem: In 2014, past-30-day use of alcohol among high school students in three local communities was higher than the state average of 36% (Jackson: 38%; Redmond: 39%; Smithtown: 42%)						
Intervening Variables	Strategy	Target Group	Outputs	Outcomes		
				Short-Term	Intermediate	Long-Term
High perceived ease of access to alcohol from commercial sources among students in grades 9–12 in the targeted communities	Responsible beverage service training	All alcohol retail establishments in the targeted communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of establishments targeted ▪ Number of establishments trained ▪ Number of individuals trained 	Increase in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and responsible serving/selling practices among those trained	Decrease in perceived ease of access to alcohol from commercial sources among students in grades 9–12 in the cluster	Decrease in the number of students in grades 9–12 in the cluster who report past-30-day use of alcohol



Analyzing Your Situation

Even though the strategy itself (i.e., responsible beverage service training) is not a social marketing campaign, communications could support this strategy in the following ways:

- Publicize the availability of free responsible server trainings
- Educate policymakers about the importance of mandatory server training for new establishments and license renewals
- Promote outreach to local business owners about the importance of training their employees

Important notes

Keep in mind that not all prevention strategies will lend themselves to the use of communications tactics throughout their implementation.

Before you begin implementing something new, you will need to get the buy-in or participation of community stakeholders—and you'll need to use the right language and tactics to communicate with them about why they should care about what you are proposing.

By analyzing your coalition's capacities and identifying which of your prevention strategies align well with a communications campaigns, you'll be better prepared to share information with your intended audience. **Worksheet A** will help you strategically map out how a communications campaign can support your project goals.



Identifying and Understanding Your Audience

Part 2: Identifying and Understanding Your Audience

This section of the toolkit provides resources to help you build a detailed profile of your audience. Social marketing tools can help you better understand this audience—and, ultimately, better communicate with them.

You will always have multiple audiences in your community, so it's important to decide who the *intended audience* (the “target group” in your logic model) is for your communications efforts.

Generally, in prevention work, there are two main types of audiences: *targets of change* and *agents of change*. Targets of change are those whom you'd like to see take action and whose behavior you'd like to change. Targets of change often fall into two categories:

1. Those who directly experience the problem or who are at risk for the problem
 2. Those who contribute to a problem through their actions or inaction
- ⇒ For more on this, see “Identifying Targets and Agents of Change: Who Can Benefit and Who Can Help”: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/analyze/where-to-start/identify-targets-and-agents-of-change/main>

Agents of change are those who can help you reach your targets of change.

For example, if you would like to reduce alcohol use among teens, then teenagers are your *targets of change*—the ones whose behavior you'd like to change. But since parents are the ones who can have face-to-face conversations with their kids—and possibly influence those sons and daughters to make healthier decisions—parents are your *agents of change*.

You need to identify whether your efforts will be directed at your targets of change or your agents of change. Whichever group you choose becomes your intended audience.



Identifying and Understanding Your Audience

For the logic model examples below, we have identified the desired change, the target of change, and the agent of change.

Problem to be addressed: Underage drinking						
Local manifestation of the problem: A high number of youth have access to alcohol through social sources						
Intervening Variables	Strategy	Target Group	Outputs	Outcomes		
				Short-Term	Intermediate	Long-Term
Underage youth have access to alcohol from parents in the home	Educate parents on social host liability laws	Parents	Number of parents receiving education on social host liability laws	Increased knowledge among parents of social host laws and legal consequences	Decrease in youth's social access to alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decreased number of parents who provide alcohol to underage youth in their homes ▪ Decreased rates of alcohol use among high school students

In this example, the desired change is *reduced alcohol use among teenagers*, the target of change is *high school students*, and the agent of change is *parents*.

Problem identified by BSAS: Misuse/abuse of opioids						
Local manifestation of the problem: 5.16% of local high school students in grades 9–12 report past-30-day misuse of prescription drugs in 2013–2014						
Intervening Variables	Strategy	Target Group	Outputs	Outcomes		
				Short-Term	Intermediate	Long-Term
Access to prescription pain medication	Provide education to prescribers in best practices for prescribing pain medication	Opioid prescribers	Number of clinical providers who receive training	Prescribers are more knowledgeable of best practices for prescribing opioids	Decrease in number of unnecessary opioid prescriptions	Decreased rates of prescription drug misuse among high school students



Identifying and Understanding Your Audience

In this example, the desired change is a *reduced number of people who misuse pain medication*, the target of change is *people who are prescribed pain medication*, and the agent of change is *doctors, dentists, and nurse practitioners who can (and should) use safer prescribing practices*.

Problem identified by BSAS: Increase in opioid overdoses						
Local manifestation of the problem: People using opioids report a lack of knowledge of opioid overdose harm reduction and opioid overdose prevention strategies						
Intervening Variables	Strategy	Target Group	Outputs	Outcomes		
				Short-Term	Intermediate	Long-Term
Lack of knowledge of opioid overdose risk factors and harm reduction strategies, such as how to access and administer naloxone	Provide training and information to opioid users and bystanders on opioid overdose awareness and prevention strategies, such as the administration of naloxone and safe linkage to medical care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People at risk for opioid overdose Bystanders 	Number of people who receive training in opioid overdose awareness and prevention and in administration of naloxone	Increase in knowledge about opioids, overdose prevention strategies, and naloxone	Increase in users' ability to implement harm-reduction strategies when using opioids	Decrease in the number of fatal and non-fatal opioid overdoses

In this example, the desired change is *save lives by increasing the number of people who are prepared to reverse an opioid overdose*. The target of change is *active users*, and the agent of change is *active users, bystanders, family, and first responders who get trained to administer naloxone*.

Note: In this example, active users are both the target of change and a possible agent of change.

Identifying your intended audience is the first step in learning more about them. The more you know about this group, the more likely it is that you'll approach communicating with them not just as a demographic or a statistic, but as human beings with values, beliefs, and a million things that may be vying for their attention at any given time. The community assessment you do as part of your strategic plan can serve as a helpful tool for learning about the intended audience for your communications campaign.



Identifying and Understanding Your Audience

⇒ Step 1 of MassTAPP's Strategic Prevention Framework can guide you through the tasks of community assessment: <http://masstapp.edc.org/prevention-planning/step-1-assessment>

Other effective methods to learn more about your audience include the following:

- Focus groups
- In-depth interviews
- Surveys
- Environmental scans

Even when the members of your intended audience share certain demographics or identifying traits (such as being the parents of high school students), there will still be variation within the group. Keep in mind that a number of variables could influence your audience to act—or not act—in terms of behavior change, whether it's calling 911 or talking with their kids about the dangers of marijuana. For example:

- Readiness to act
- Language
- Motivations
- Values and beliefs
- Educational background
- Socioeconomic background

Use what you know about your intended audience—demographics, other identifying traits, and the variables listed above—to create an *audience profile*: a list of important demographic characteristics of a typical member of your intended audience. This can help you better tailor your message.

You can then combine this basic demographic information with more specific details about the audience you want to reach to create an *audience persona*—an archetype, or model, of someone who could be found in your intended audience. Think of an audience persona as an audience profile that has come to life. While the audience persona is fictional, he or she embodies the essence of an audience member you wish to reach.



Identifying and Understanding Your Audience

- ⇒ See “Creating Personas for Priority Groups of Social Marketing Programs” for more information: http://socialmarketing.blogs.com/r_craig_lefebvres_social/2012/10/creating-personas-for-priority-groups-of-social-marketing-programs.html

An audience persona is one of the most helpful tools in social marketing. Creating this persona gives you a vivid image of the type of person who may see or hear your message. As a result, when you craft your message, you’ll be writing for real people, not a demographic. This makes it more likely that your message will not only reach your audience, it will also resonate with them and inspire them to take action.

An audience persona can include the following:

- A first name (and maybe a last name)
- Defining demographics (age, ethnicity, gender, education level, spiritual beliefs, disability status, etc.)
- Values and priorities
- How the persona spends his or her free time
- A place where he or she can best be reached
- How he or she accesses news and information (newspaper, radio, social media, e-mail, etc.)
- How he or she might respond when interacting with or encountering your coalition
- Actions he or she could take to help spur substance abuse/misuse behavior change

- ⇒ The Content Marketing Institute offers more information about creating an audience persona: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2015/04/content-marketing-personas/>

- ⇒ This article on the “Getting Attention” website provides an sample of an audience persona: <http://gettingattention.org/articles/202/audience-research/nonprofit-audience-research-persona.html>

By considering your audience members as either agents of change or as targets of change and by building an audience persona, you’ll have a better understanding of their values, priorities, and defining characteristics. **Worksheet B** will guide you toward creating a detailed profile of your audience.



Developing Your Message

Part 3: Developing Your Message

This section of the toolkit builds on the knowledge you've gleaned regarding your intended audience and provides guidance on developing a clear and culturally appropriate message that resonates with your audience and calls them to action.

If you wish to communicate in a compelling, concise, and memorable way, you need to be clear about what you want to accomplish. You must determine what your core message is, and then decide how to communicate it.

This is where the *message triangle* comes into play. Each point on the triangle serves as a point you want to make to support your core message: a problem statement, a program strategy, and a call to action:

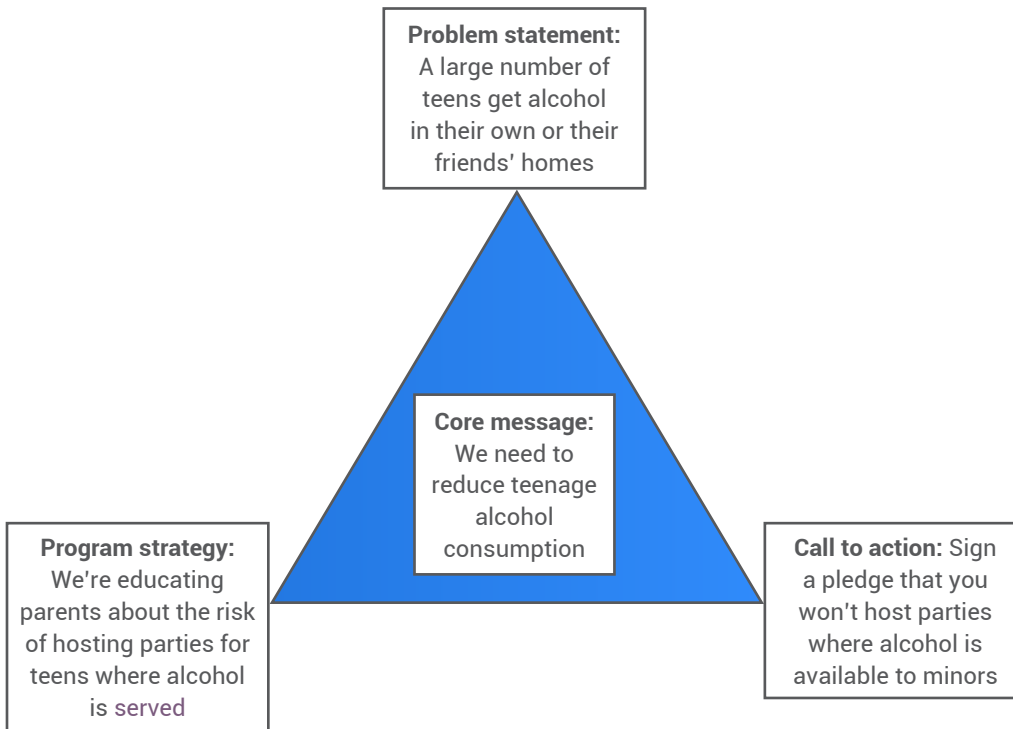
- **Problem statement:** What problem are you addressing, and why is it important to your intended audience?
- **Program strategy:** How is your coalition addressing the problem in a way that will resonate with your intended audience?
- **Call to action:** What steps can your intended audience take that will lead to better outcomes?

Work with your coalition to determine what information is most important to relay and most likely to inspire your intended audience to take action.



Developing Your Message

Here's an example of a message triangle about reducing teenage alcohol consumption:



By combining the three points of the triangle, you come up with the following statements that address your core message (We need to reduce teenage alcohol consumption):

- Did you know that a large number of teens have access to alcohol at home or in the homes of their friends?
- We of the XYZ coalition are educating parents about the risk of hosting parties for teens where alcohol is served.
- Will you sign a pledge that you won't host parties where alcohol is available to minors?

As you craft a message that will encourage a change in a group's attitudes, behaviors, or actions, keep your audience persona at the forefront of the discussion.



Developing Your Message

As you brainstorm, remember these basic principles of persuasion:

- Know your facts
- Minimize the costs of the behavior change
- Emphasize the similarities between you and your audience
- Provide a clear step for taking action
- Repeat your message if necessary

Be aware that when crafting messages for an issue as complex as substance misuse/abuse prevention, you need to be sensitive in certain areas. Again, think of your audience persona. Would your message cause the persona to feel marginalized, misunderstood, patronized, shamed, or stigmatized? Are you inadvertently perpetuating stereotypes that need to be addressed or reexamined?

Testing your message with a representative sample group—a key part of planning a communications campaign—can help to ensure that what you’re communicating resonates with your intended audience. You can do this either through a focus group or through user testing with individuals that have been identified through key informants. This valuable feedback can help determine whether you need to refine or revise your communications campaign. That way, when you *do* launch your campaign, you’ll have a better idea of how your audience may respond—and a better chance of effectively promoting behavior change.

Many of us who work in the field of substance misuse prevention strive for cultural and linguistic sensitivity—avoiding language that stigmatizes community members, and embracing language that humanizes those who struggle with substance misuse. Here are some examples of alternative language that can be substituted for stigmatizing terms that are often used when discussing substance misuse:

Words to avoid	Preferred alternatives
Addict, abuser, junkie	Person with a substance use disorder, person misusing drugs
Drug habit	Active addiction, substance use disorder, alcohol and drug disease
Clean/dirty	Negative/positive, substance-free



Developing Your Message

Some additional tips for ensuring sensitivity and effectiveness in your communications efforts:

- **Choose humanizing language.** Alternative and respectful vocabulary can help pave the way for dismantling stigma, word by word, syllable by syllable.
 - ⇒ The National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment offers guidance on reducing stigma through language: https://www.naabt.org/documents/NAABT_Language.pdf
- **Tailor your language to your audience.** Meet your audience members where they are. Avoid jargon and words that may alienate your listeners or readers. Focus on empowering them with relevant knowledge offered clearly and succinctly.
- **Embrace cultural and linguistic competency.** Be aware that certain strategies that might work well with the dominant or majority group may not be appropriate for members of other cultural groups. Recognize that significant diversity exists within cultures—and that no one cultural group is a single entity.
 - ⇒ To learn more about cultural and linguistic competency, visit this page on the MassTAPP website: <http://masstapp.edc.org/cultural-competence>

By incorporating models such as the three-part message triangle and by choosing culturally appropriate language, you increase the likelihood that your message will resonate with your audience and compel them to respond to your call to action. **Worksheet C** offers prompts, tips, and checklists to guide you in drafting your message.



Creating and Implementing a Communications Strategy

Part 4: Creating and Implementing a Communications Strategy

Now that you've determined exactly *what* you want to say, it's time to decide *how* best to share it with your intended audience. This section of the toolkit offers guidance on how to strategically enlist the various types of communications channels in the implementation of your communications campaign.

There are many ways to reach your intended audience. Choosing the right communications channel is a matter of matching the content of your message with the venue where your audience is most likely to receive it.

You may need to get the same message out to different audiences in different ways. For example, if you want parents and teens to learn about the impact of early marijuana use on brain development, you might reach out to parents through the schools' e-mail lists, whereas you might reach out to youth via Instagram.

Often, though, your communications strategy is intended for only one audience segment and is appropriate for only one particular channel. For example, if your aim is to teach family members of people using drugs about how to recognize and reverse an overdose, a presentation at a support group meeting will be much more effective than a big media campaign.

- ⇒ For more information, see "Putting the Fear Back Into Fear Appeals: The Extended Parallel Process Model: <https://www.msu.edu/~wittek/fearback.htm>
- ⇒ Negative messaging also leads to ethical considerations. See "Ethical Considerations on the Use of Fear in Public Health Campaigns": <http://www.clinicalcorrelations.org/?p=4998>

Pay attention to the research about positive vs. negative messages. For example, if your intended audience sees themselves as vulnerable to a negative outcome *and* they can see that taking action will mitigate the outcome *and* they have the wherewithal to act, then a fear-based or negative message could be effective. This health education theory is known as the Extended Parallel Process model. Keep in mind, though, that if any of those three conditions are not met, negative messaging could backfire.



Creating and Implementing a Communications Strategy

There are a number of different communications pathways you might use to share your prevention messages. We have divided the key channels into six categories:

- Interpersonal communication
- Outreach and education to local groups
- Mass media campaigns
- Media relations
- Social media
- Non-traditional communication

Each channel is discussed in more detail below, including why and how each can be a conduit for your communications efforts.

Interpersonal communication

This approach involves individual outreach to key stakeholders or other agents of change in your community in order to get buy-in or support for your prevention program.

Here are some examples of when interpersonal communications strategies are appropriate and beneficial:

- The chief of police is reluctant to authorize officers to carry Narcan due to concerns about liability or union issues. Direct interpersonal outreach from someone whom the chief respects could allay these concerns.
- School nurses would like to incorporate SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment) into their regular health screenings, but the school superintendent is not familiar with the intervention and does not want give the public the impression that drug use is a big problem in the district. A face-to-face conversation between someone on your team and the superintendent can help convey the benefits of SBIRT and address the superintendent's concerns.
- Bar and restaurant owners don't understand the advantages of providing all their employees with training about serving liquor to underage customers. Approaching these business people individually can help them better understand the need for this training, particularly how it can protect their bottom line.



Creating and Implementing a Communications Strategy

To use the interpersonal approach:

- Select the appropriate “messenger.” The best person to approach stakeholders or agents of change is someone who is trusted by them and has credibility in their eyes. That person is your messenger. (Note: It may not be you!)
- Make sure to prepare your messenger so that he or she communicates a consistent message.
- Plan how you’re going to deliver your message, and keep your intended audience firmly in mind. Be prepared with an answer to their uppermost question: *What’s in it for me?* Think through what they have to gain by committing to the behavior change or action you’re asking of them.
- Develop an “elevator pitch.” If you only had 60 seconds to talk to an agent of change, what three things do you want this individual to take away from your encounter? (Remember your message triangle!)
 - ⇒ Considering doing the online activity “First Impressions Count”: http://3boldsteps.promoteprevent.org/partner/build-your-team?v=full_interactive_step
- Get creative about how to secure a one-on-one meeting with a key decision-maker. For example, ask to meet for coffee before the work day or stop by before the day’s schedule begins to drop information off, and ask if there’s time to follow-up in the following week.

Additional tips

- **Close the deal.** Don’t expect your contact to connect all the dots on his or her own. Make sure you know what you want to get out of an encounter, and ask for it. But have a Plan B in place in case your “ask” (call to action) is too steep for that individual.
- **Be concise.** Make your point (use your message triangle) and get to “the ask.”
- **Bring flyers and/or business cards.** Leave something in writing so your contact can easily remember you and get in touch again. Your goal is establish a long-term relationship, not a drive-by “ask.”
- **Follow up.** E-mail a reminder of your “ask,” or send a thank-you if your request was successful.



Creating and Implementing a Communications Strategy

Outreach and education to local groups

When you prepared your audience profile or persona, you identified a group of people with shared characteristics, values, lifestyles, and/or demographics. Next, you developed a message tailored to the interests and needs of this specific group. For example:

- Parents of high school students who need to be informed about the risks of hosting parties where alcohol is served
- People who misuse drugs and need to know how to rescue a friend who is overdosing or where to find resources about treatment options
- Middle school students whom you want to teach about the consequences of early alcohol or marijuana use
- Emergency room physicians whom you wish to educate about safe prescribing practices

An effective and direct way to communicate your message to members of a group is by gathering them in one place and doing something with them *as a group*—through a presentation, a delivered curriculum, or a town hall meeting. For example:

- Public speaking forums are a good place to deliver your message if your intention is to disseminate information, raise awareness, and get a discussion started. These include PTO meetings, teacher professional development days, school board or city council, town meetings, required meetings for parents of school athletes, and faith-based gatherings.
- Parent-hosted neighborhood coffees are good venues for disseminating information about what can be done to resolve issues of mutual concern. Such gatherings are particularly effective if you want to have one set of engaged parents work to engage another set of parents.

Additional tips

- Take advantage of natural opportunities to engage groups, such as fundraisers, sports awards nights, or meetings of the local chapters of fraternal or professional organizations.
- Consider involving individuals who have already bought into your message and goals so they can influence others who may be sitting on the fence.



Creating and Implementing a Communications Strategy

- Consider training a cadre of messengers, which will enable you to reach greater numbers of intended audience members through a greater number of venues.

Mass media campaigns

Sometimes, the best way to get your message across is by sharing it widely with your intended audience through mass media, such as PSAs, local cable channels, newspaper announcements, billboard advertisements, and television and radio spots.

If your intended audience makes up a large segment of your community (e.g., all adults who drive on Main Street, all teens who take public transportation, all tax-payers in your region), a mass media campaign is an excellent channel for your message. Audiences who can be reached via broad-based campaigns include the following:

- Teens who become aware of positive alternatives to substance use and other risky behaviors via PSAs or bulletin board campaigns
- Community members who learn about a drug take-back day through signs and flyers at local events, radio and TV spots, and newspapers announcements
- Individuals picking up prescription pain medications from local pharmacies who receive a flyer about safe use, storage, and disposal of prescriptions
- High school or college students whose misperceptions about the percentage of peers who participate in binge drinking are corrected via a social norms campaign that's communicated through PSAs, radio and TV spots, bulletin board campaigns, etc.

Here are two examples of mass media campaigns:

- Massachusetts Department of Public Health's *Parent Power* campaign was designed to bring the same message to all parents, statewide, about the importance of talking to their children about substance use.
 - ⇒ Learn more: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/substance-abuse/prevention/parent-power.html>
- SAMHSA's *Talk. They Hear You* campaign encourages parents to talk with their kids about the dangers of underage drinking.
 - ⇒ Learn more: <http://www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources>



Creating and Implementing a Communications Strategy

- ⇒ The MassTAPP social norms gallery showcases successful examples of this approach: <http://masstapp.edc.org/social-norms-gallery>

Additional tips

- Use your data to make sure that the kind of campaign you are doing makes sense. For example, don't try a social norms campaign if there aren't any data showing pervasive misperceptions about the issue you're addressing! Browse the Internet for examples of other campaigns used in similar circumstances to see if there's a good fit with what you're trying to accomplish.
- You may want to adapt a national or state campaign to a local community, if it fits with the community's needs.
 - ⇒ The *Above the Influence* anti-substance-abuse campaign implemented this approach with great success: <http://abovetheinfluence.com/>

Media relations

Media professionals play powerful roles in educating and persuading audiences. A carefully cultivated relationship with friendly media professionals can provide you with easy access to a large segment of your intended audience or stakeholder group. The media can be your best friend . . .

. . . or your worst enemy. Be aware: Journalists who are looking for a sensational or one-sided story may oversimplify your message or ignore the key points you want to make.

The following guidelines can help you make the most of your relationship with the media:

- Proactively cultivate conversations with the media. Write an op-ed or an opinion piece, or invite the media to an event you're holding.
- Have sound bites ready to go.
- Bridge back to your key message. Use such phrases as "the key issue is" and "the most important thing."
- If no one asks the question you'd like to be asked, ask (and answer) it yourself.
- Frame the conversation in a positive way.

You also might consider a *social norms campaign*—an approach to behavior change that draws on public health communication strategies to share data about the actual behaviors of a certain population and, in doing so, corrects popular misperceptions about those behaviors. This approach is an especially effective way to set the record straight on a certain issue or topic. Channels for social norms campaigns include posters, assemblies, and social media.



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- Emphasize what people can do to help (such as safely disposing of medications).
- Frame substance abuse and misuse as a health, safety, and economic issue.

Additional tips

It's also important to know what *not* to do. Here are some common mistakes to avoid when you communicate with the media:

- Don't use scare tactics.
- Don't encourage sensation-seeking.
- Don't lecture, guilt, or shame an audience.
 - ⇒ SAMHSA's Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies (CAPT) offers more do's and don'ts for working with the media: https://captus.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/capt_resource/media_talking_points_tip_sheet_final.forweb.mel_.pdf

Social media

Social media includes websites and applications that allow users to share information and network with one another. Examples of social media channels are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit, SnapChat, and YouTube.

The advantages of this communications channel are numerous:

- Social media allows you to connect with an audience in the environment where they spend a lot of time
- It's an efficient way to share information that is often updated and frequently changing
- Setting up an account is usually free
- Social media is easily accessed by those who use the Internet
- It can be interactive, as users may post comments and questions

Disadvantages of social media include that it requires time and consistency to keep information relevant and up to date and that readers must be motivated and active for social media campaigns to have an impact.



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You should only launch a social media campaign when you are absolutely clear about your message, your audience, and what you hope to accomplish through this medium.

Here are some examples of good uses of social media to support your program efforts:

- A group of peer leaders has developed a positive social norms campaign to dispel misconceptions about binge drinking. Images and slogans that appear on posters throughout the high school are also posted on Instagram, the social media site most popular with students.
- A community coalition is seeking to raise awareness about local efforts to combat the opioid epidemic. The group is using Facebook as a one-stop source for sharing articles and posting information about upcoming meetings and events.

Many online resources are available on how to optimize social media platforms, such as Facebook and Reddit, to share your message.

- ⇒ The digital media website Mashable offers The Beginner's Guide to Social Media: <http://mashable.com/2012/06/12/social-media-beginners-guide/>

Additional tips

- Use tools such as Google Analytics to analyze past content and improve future posts.
- Deliver content on a consistent schedule.
- Post at strategic times of day (you can research when your audience is most likely to read messages).
- Use images to highlight your written content.
- Even if you're posting quickly, check for typos and strive for correct grammar.



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Non-traditional communication

Sometimes you need or want to get your message to your intended audience in ways that don't necessarily fit into one of the categories above. Perhaps you need a communications channel that is especially novel or highly interactive, or your budget doesn't allow for a more traditional media campaign.

There are many creative ways to reach your audience that complement the more traditional communications tactics. Often, these channels are created by young people or coalition members who have a real understanding of the local community and/or what will capture the attention of local news sources.

Some examples of non-traditional communications channels:

- Guerilla marketing (e.g., human placards, postering public bathroom stalls)
 - ⇒ See the Creative Guerilla Marketing website for other ideas: <http://www.creativeguerrillamarketing.com/what-is-guerrilla-marketing/>
- Public venues (e.g., mobile billboards, street art, wallsapes)
- Transit (e.g., bus or vehicle wraps, bus/train/subway stations, posters, pedicabs)

While such channels may reach a more limited audience, they may also appeal to audiences who might not respond to more conventional media sources.

- ⇒ The Moss Project Boston used creative pop-up messages designed to get people noticing and talking about substance use: http://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/Addiction-Services/the_moss_project/Pages/the-moss-project.aspx
- ⇒ Worcester's "I'm About This Life" positive norms campaign uses T-shirts and other "swag" to raise awareness and gain support: http://hopecoalitionworcester.org/blog/?page_id=535
- ⇒ For more on unconventional communications channels, see "Nontraditional Media": http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/53212_ch_5.pdf



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Additional tips

- Think outside the box, but also consider your intended audience. Are they likely to relate to a nontraditional approach? If so, which ones?
- Be sure to ask for permission if you are posting something like flyers in a place such as a restaurant or café.

Choosing your communications channel

When comparing the various types of communications channels to share your message, it's important to consider which ones best align with the needs of your audience members. It's also important to set goals for the communications campaigns you're going to implement. For example:

By *Z date*, the ABC communications campaign will reach *X number* of our intended audience by *Y means* (channel or channels) and will inspire *W number* of actions.

Worksheet D takes you through a number of decision points to determine the best communications channel(s) to use for your purposes.



Evaluating Your Communications Efforts

Part 5: Evaluating Your Communications Efforts

This section of the toolkit outlines key points to keep in mind when evaluating the successes of and lessons learned from your communications efforts.

Evaluation is a critical but often neglected component of communication efforts. It provides valuable information about what is working and what is not so you can decide where efforts and budget dollars may be best spent in the future. Just as you evaluate the other components of your logic model, you need to also evaluate your communications components on an ongoing basis.

Ultimately, you want to impact your target of change and reach your long-term outcomes: reducing substance use and saving lives. Though we usually can't make a direct connection between a single prevention strategy (such as a communications campaign) and behavior change within the group that is the target of change, it's nonetheless important to be able to show that some movement has been made toward the desired outcomes of your program (such as reducing teenage binge drinking or the number of overdoses).

For example, while you can implement a social media campaign to try to raise awareness of the misuse of prescription drugs, it's difficult to determine whether the attitudes, knowledge, or behavior of the person who reads the online post have changed (i.e., outcome measures), unless you employ pre- and post-campaign surveys, which tends to be both expensive and time-consuming. However, you can count how many people have seen the online messages, a metric that requires less money and takes less time to gather.

Measuring effectiveness

To help measure the effectiveness of your communications efforts, you might consider collecting and tracking metrics for the following categories:

- Requests you receive for materials or information
- Attendees at a promoted event
- Web visitors (both unique and repeat visitors)
- People reached via social media, using Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram analytics
- Positive news stories or stories promoting your message in local or national media



Evaluating Your Communications Efforts

- New volunteers, coalition members, or partner organizations
- Stakeholders explicitly expressing support for your work

Here are some tools you can use to help measure various metrics:

- Google Analytics (tracks Web visitors and traffic)
- Survey Monkey (polls users for both qualitative and quantitative data)
- Constant Contact/Mailchimp (tracks reader interaction with e-mail campaigns)
- Written (paper) surveys (distributed before or after an in-person event)
- In-person interviews (either formal, with a specific set of pre-determined questions, or informal—seeking general feedback)

It may also be possible to determine the number of local or community policies that were changed or instituted as a result of your efforts.

Changes in community attitudes and individual behavior are harder to measure and may only be partly due to your communications efforts (especially as they are only one of a number of tactics you've employed). While it's possible to gather such information, this type of data collection requires more intensive efforts, such as surveys and long-term observation.

When trying to measure the effectiveness of your communications campaign, consider asking your team some of the following questions:

- **Participant outreach:**
 - Did you meet your target number of attendees at the event you hosted (e.g., an opioid-focused community forum, a town hall meeting about underage drinking)?
 - Did participants stay for the entire event?
 - Were the participants (parents, policymakers, youth) the audience you originally intended?
 - How well was your message received or understood by your target audience? How do you know?



Evaluating Your Communications Efforts

- **Community attitudes:**
 - Can you see (or measure) a change in attitudes toward your program or its participants?
 - Did community norms change?
 - Was there an increase in youth's perceptions about the harmful effects of marijuana?
 - Are more parents calling ahead to fellow parents when their child is invited over to ensure that the parents are actually home?
 - Is the community at large now more aware of the opioid epidemic?
 - Do community members view the public health problem as a disease that they want to take action to cure?
 - How do you know?
- **Stakeholder support:**
 - Did you get what you wanted (e.g., a next meeting with the police chief, the beginnings of a relationship with the mayor, contact names, an agreement to consider policy changes)?
 - Are first responders now carrying Narcan?
 - Were alcohol ads banned from town property?
 - Will the local high school administer the Youth Risk Behavior Survey?
 - Did stakeholders consider and/or approve your budget?
 - Will the police department take financial responsibility for compliance checks and "Shoulder Taps"?
- **Funding:**
 - Did you receive additional funding?
 - Has the health department picked up the coordinator's salary?
 - Did you get in-kind donations?
 - Did a local business provide refreshments for a drug take-back day?
 - Is the hospital going to fund a recovery coach for the emergency room?
 - Will the local pharmacy pay for the printing of the drug disposal educational brochures to be distributed with prescriptions?



Evaluating Your Communications Efforts

And finally:

- At the end of the day, what was the ultimate outcome of your efforts?

Evaluating and reevaluating your message

Since messaging is such a key component of your communications efforts, it's important to evaluate its effectiveness—both before *and* after you launch your communications activities. When it comes to evaluating messaging, the key areas to evaluate are relevance, “stickiness,” and reach:

- **Relevance:** Does the core message resonate with the intended audience? You may have tested your message before it was finalized, but times and situations change; you may need to retest it to see whether it still fits your intended audience.
- **Stickiness:** Does the message stick in the minds of your audience? Do people actually remember it and interpret or act on it as you intended?
- **Reach:** To what extent did your communications efforts reach your intended audience? Reach can be measured by a variety of metrics, such as attendance at events, hits to a website, likes on Facebook, and number of retweets.

Documenting your efforts

In addition to assessing the effectiveness of your plan, you should also document the process you went through and identify your successes and challenges. This will help you do three key things:

- Document your successes and demonstrate effectiveness—and make the case for more funding to continue your work
- Identify potential improvements or modifications
- Empower other similar coalitions or organizations to follow in your footsteps

Worksheet E will help you identify metrics and reporting tools that can assist you in collecting, reporting, and analyzing the data you gather to evaluate your communications campaign.

Conclusion

If communicated effectively, your message can make a difference. Whether it's about the Good Samaritan Law or the benefits of parents speaking with their kids about the dangers of marijuana, the information you share—on Facebook, in a town meeting, or on a poster—can empower your audience with knowledge. This knowledge, in turn, can empower community members to make healthier, more informed choices that can prevent or lessen substance abuse.

The five sections of this toolkit lay the groundwork for creating a communications campaign that will resonate and “stick” with your audience. The corresponding worksheets on the following pages provide further guidance and information to make your communications efforts a success.

Please note that we don't expect you to develop a communications campaign on your own or in isolation; we hope that you will work with your coalition or community partners to gather input and create strategies that fit the context and your mission. While this toolkit contains useful information about how to make use of particular channels or tactics, please consider the fundamentals of communications planning (What do you want to accomplish? Who is your audience? What is your message?) before jumping straight into a strategy. Just like a strategic plan for programming, a communications campaign should be built on a solid foundation.

We hope that this toolkit serves as a resource that you and your coalition may return to in the future. In terms of substance abuse/misuse prevention, effective communications is all about improving—and even saving—lives.

If you need assistance with your communications campaign or have any questions, please contact us via MassTAPP's website: <http://masstapp.edc.org>.

Helpful Resources

Communications tools for nonprofits

Hershey Cause Communications

<http://www.hersheycause.com/download-tools/>

Social marketing

SAMHSA's Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies

<https://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/>

[ten-steps-developing-social-marketing-campaign](#)

Boston University School of Public Health

<http://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/MPH-Modules/SB/SB721-Models/SB721-Models4.html>

Social norms marketing

National Social Norms Institute at the University of Virginia

<http://socialnorms.org/>

Social Norms Consultation

http://socialnormsconsultation.com/about_us.html

Audience research

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/audience/index.html>

The National Social Marketing Centre

<http://www.socialmarketing-toolbox.com/content/>

[identify-what-moves-and-motivates-your-audience-0](#)

Getting Attention

<http://gettingattention.org/articles/category/audience-research>

Word of Mouth Research Ltd

<http://www.socialmarketing-toolbox.com/sites/default/>

[files/432_1261695287WORDOFMOUTHSOURCESOFINSIGHTGUIDE.pdf](#)

Cultural and linguistic competence and reducing stigma

MassTAPP

<http://masstapp.edc.org/cultural-competence>

The National Alliance of Advocates for Buprenorphine Treatment

https://www.naabt.org/documents/NAABT_Language.pdf

Promoting behavior change

Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/sustain/social-marketing/promote-behavior-change/main>

Message triangles

Marketing Partners

<http://conversations.marketing-partners.com/2011/08/a-3-step-guide-to-message-triangles/>

Media relations

SAMHSA

<http://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/npw-2015-media-outreach-tip-sheet.pdf>

<http://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-for-creating-own-psa.pdf>

Social media

Forbes

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/drewhendricks/2014/05/14/20-social-media-tips-to-rule-in-2014/>

Evaluation

The Pell Institute and Pathways to College Network

<http://toolkit.pellinstitute.org/evaluation-guide/communicate-improve/evaluate-your-communication-efforts/>

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

<http://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/TOOLS/Evaluation>

Harvard Family Research Project

<http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/lessons-in-evaluating-communications-campaigns-five-case-studies>

<http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/public-communications-campaigns-and-evaluation>

MEASURE Evaluation Population and Reproductive Health

http://www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/prh/rh_indicators/crosscutting/bcc

WORKSHEET A: Identifying a Strategy to Support through Communications

Not all prevention strategies will lend themselves to using communications tactics throughout their implementation. This worksheet is designed to help you prioritize which strategies make the most sense to support with communications. You may find that one or two strategies align themselves better to communications than others do.

Select a strategy from your logic model or prevention plan.	STRATEGY 1 <hr/>	STRATEGY 2 <hr/>	STRATEGY 3 <hr/>
1. Could this strategy benefit from communications efforts? (Does it require educating or raising awareness within the community?)			
2. Are communications essential to the success of this strategy?			
3. Does this strategy have a ready audience to receive communications?			
4. Do you have the following in place to make communications efforts successful? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget • Staff • Time • Technology • Community partnerships 			

WORKSHEET B: Profiling Your Audience

Once you've identified your intended audience—whether it's your agent of change or your target of change—take some time to learn more about them. Fleshing out this profile by filling in the chart below will help you better understand your intended audience and ultimately develop a message that will resonate with them.

QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE	PROFILE
1. Who is your intended audience?	
2. Is the audience a target of change or an agent of change?	<input type="checkbox"/> Target of change <input type="checkbox"/> Agent of change
3. What are the defining demographics of your intended audience (e.g., age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, languages spoken, literacy levels, income levels, education levels, spiritual beliefs, professions, disability status)?	
4. How does this audience access news and information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper (online or print) <input type="checkbox"/> Radio <input type="checkbox"/> TV <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Television <input type="checkbox"/> Instagram <input type="checkbox"/> Informal channels <i>(e.g., community centers or gathering spots like farmers' markets)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> School or town meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Other (list here: _____)
5. What are the values and priorities of this audience?	
6. What is their current level of awareness about the problem?	
7. What do they know and think about our coalition?	
8. What could they do as individuals to get your coalition closer to achieving its intended outcome?	

WORKSHEET C: Developing Your Message

This worksheet helps you use the message triangle to develop the key components of your communications campaign message. The checklist at the bottom allows you to examine your message and consider whether it will resonate with your intended audience and clearly convey the components of your message triangle.

1. What is your core message?

2. To support your core message, answer the following questions (remember the message triangle):

1. Problem: What problem are you addressing, and why is it important to your intended audience?	
2. Strategy: How are you and your coalition addressing the problem?	
3. Call to Action: What steps can your intended audience take to get you closer to achieving your intended outcome?	

3. Now, combine these responses into one concise statement:

(Later, you can add this statement to Worksheet F as your Message)

4. Message Checklist

Is Your Message:

- Clear?
- Compelling?
- Free of Jargon?

Does Your Message:

- State a problem?
- Show a potential solution?
- Provide a call for action?

If you have trouble checking off one of the boxes, think about how you can make your message more concise or clear to your intended audience—and revise it if necessary.

WORKSHEET D: Creating and Implementing a Communication Strategy

How will you share your message with your intended audience? Several different channels may be a good fit in terms of communicating with your audience. Use the information you've gathered in Worksheet D to think about which channel might best reach your intended audience. Once you decide on the optimal channel(s) and approach(es), use the action plan template to create an action plan and carry out your communications campaign.

<p>1. Select a marketing channel or channels <i>(i.e., mass media, interpersonal, community outreach, social media, media relations, non-traditional media, other).</i></p>	
<p>2. Why did you select this channel?</p>	
<p>3. What's your plan for conveying your message through this channel?</p>	
<p>4. What are your goals for this campaign?</p>	<p>By <u>(date)</u>, we will reach <u>(percent or number)</u> of our intended audience through <u>(communications channel)</u>.*</p> <p>Our communications campaign in its entirety will reach <u>(percent or number)</u> by <u>(date)</u> and lead to <u>(number)</u> of actions taken.</p> <p>* You can repeat this same sentence for each channel you intend to use.</p>

Use this information to create your action plan. For an action plan template and sample action plan, visit the MassTAPP website: <http://masstapp.edc.org/step-3-strategic-planning/task-7-develop-action-plan>

WORKSHEET E: Evaluation

How do you know if your communications plan is reaching the intended audience and having an impact? This worksheet assists you in looking at the communications channels you've used, the intended outcomes, and the measures you could use to determine whether your communications efforts were a success and what tweaks are needed. Questions 4–9 will help you develop an evaluation plan and identify a process for collecting, analyzing, and reporting your communications campaign data.

<p>1. What communications channels have you employed?</p>	
<p>2. What action or behavior change are you expecting to take place as a result of your communication efforts?</p>	
<p>3. What specific measures will provide indicators of the success of your communications efforts? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of requests you receive for materials or information • The number of attendees at a promoted event • The number of Web visitors (both unique and repeat visitors) • The number of people reached via social media, using Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram analytics • The number of positive news stories or stories promoting your message in local or national media • The number of new volunteers, coalition members, or partner organizations • The number of new sources of funding or increased levels of funding • The number of policies changed or instituted • The number of stakeholders explicitly expressing support for your work • Survey data (pre- and post-) 	
<p>4. How will you collect these data?</p>	
<p>5. How often will you review and/or report on these data?</p>	

WORKSHEET E: Evaluation (continued)

6. How long will you evaluate this effort?	
7. Who will be responsible for the collection of data?	
8. Who will be responsible for reviewing and/or reporting the data?	
9. Who will receive these reports?	

WORKSHEET F: My Communications Plan

Your communications plan is a bird's-eye view of your overall communications efforts and the decisions that you've made along the way. Use this worksheet to give your coalition members and others an overall snapshot of how your communications campaign will support your prevention strategy or strategies.

Once you've completed Worksheets A through E, each of which corresponds to a section in this toolkit, compile all the decisions that you've made into this worksheet, your communications plan.

	RESPONSE
<p>Prevention Strategy to Support What prevention strategy or strategies will your communications campaign support? <i>(use the information from your logic model and Worksheet A)</i></p>	
<p>Audience Who is your intended audience? <i>(use the information from Worksheet B)</i></p>	
<p>Message What is your message? <i>(use the information from Worksheet C)</i></p>	
<p>Implementation Strategy/Channel What is your communications channel and approach? <i>(use the information from Worksheet D)</i></p>	
<p>Evaluation What will be your measures of success? <i>(use the information from Worksheet E)</i></p>	