Strategies for Developing Culturally Driven Public Health Communications

Public Health
Communications
COLLABORATIVE

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Culturally Driven Communication

Culturally driven communication is focused on inclusion. Unlike a "one-size-fits-all" approach, culturally driven communication prioritizes the preferences and perspectives of your target audience as you design messaging, visuals, and outreach.

Recognizing and incorporating the diversity of people's cultures, values, and beliefs allows you to more effectively communicate with multicultural audiences. Culturally driven communication emphasizes positive and authentic representation of multicultural audiences to ensure each priority population feels represented within and can relate to your messaging.

How to Use this Guide

The guide is divided into three sections—messaging, visuals, and outreach—to support the development of your public health communications. Each section offers strategies and tools to help you create materials that build stronger relationships, increase credibility, and improve health outcomes.

Glossary

Best practices: A set of guidelines or recommendations that, if followed, are expected to produce the best outcomes.

Call to action (CTA): An instruction to the audience that encourages them to take some kind of action. Examples include visiting a website, calling a phone number, completing a form, or getting a vaccine.

Creative brief: Core document that provides an overview of the strategy of a communications, marketing or advertising initiative. Content may include: project purpose, goals and objectives, target audiences with key cultural and demographic insights, background including challenges and opportunities, key messaging, unique value proposition, creative approach with attitude/tone, call to action, outreach/activation channels.

Cultural competence: The ability to understand, appreciate, and effectively work with people from diverse cultures.

Culture: A set of beliefs, behaviors, values, and practices shared by a group of people.

Diversity: The presence and inclusion of many aspects of human difference, social identities, and abilities within a social group or organization.

Ethnicity: The culture of people in a specific geographic region, including their language, heritage, religion, and customs.

Multicultural audiences: Persons with one or more cultural or ethnic backgrounds who are not usually viewed as part of the nation's majority culture. Characteristics such as race, ethnicity, tribe, religion, linguistics, or cultural origin may be used to describe multicultural audiences. Inclusive of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

Nationality: Belonging to a particular nation, whether by birth or naturalization.

Target audience: The group of people who you want to reach to raise awareness, inform, or motivate to take action. Individual target audiences may share demographic similarities such as age, race, ethnicity, location, profession, or socioeconomic status.

Tone: The attitude or mood conveyed in communication. Examples of tones include: serious, professional, casual, dramatic, personable, urgent, etc.

Translations: Word-for-word message adaptations from one language to another.

Transcreations: Message adaptations from one language to another language, utilizing cultural approaches that maintain the original intent and context.

CULTURALLY DRIVEN
Messaging

Messaging includes two important components: the information being conveyed and the methods of sharing that information. How you structure and share your messaging is crucial to effective and culturally driven communication.

Effective messaging:

- Uses plain language.
- Helps target audiences understand the topic or issue.
- Conveys the importance of the issue.
- Is appropriate for the audience's health literacy level.
- Clearly states the action(s) people should take.

Culturally driven messaging also:

- Considers tone and formality.
- Reflects cultural nuances.
- Addresses historical challenges and barriers.
- Avoids direct word-for-word translations.
- Is ideally created in partnership with members of the target audience.

To effectively engage with a multicultural audience, you should start by learning about their motivations, lifestyles, preferences, misconceptions, and specific health needs. To reduce bias and assumption, this learning should take place in partnership with the community you are trying to reach. Examples include talking to people in the community and building relationships with trusted messengers who can inform and share your messages.

Crafting Your Messages

Once you have a clear understanding of your audience, you are ready to begin crafting your messages. Key considerations for developing culturally driven messages include:

- **Plan for in-language communications.** Does your audience communicate primarily in English, or do you need to create messaging in multiple languages? If you are planning to create messaging in multiple languages, account for this at the start of your process.

- **Choose the right tone.** Consider the appropriate tone to establish trust and credibility across your audience. The wrong tone—for example, informal vs. formal—can be read as disrespectful.
- **Apply an equity lens.** Check for language that conveys implicit bias, microaggressions, racism, discrimination, and/or hate speech. Language that is grounded in equity and inclusion will better connect with your audience, and help build trust and credibility.
- **Consider storytelling.** The lived experiences of real people who reflect your target audience is an effective person-first approach. When developing messaging, consider using a storytelling approach to make the content more relatable and resonant.
- **Confirm and refine.** After you develop the messages, confirm them with focus groups, informal interviews, or conversations with people within your target audience. Listen to the feedback and incorporate it into your final messaging.

Translation vs. Transcreation Process

When developing multicultural messaging, "transcreations" will work better than literal translations. Transcreation is best done in partnership with a member of your target audience who specializes in the specific language of outreach. Machine or artificial intelligence translation tools can be used but will require additional support from a trusted editor.

Translations	Transcreations
• Replace words in one language with corresponding words in another language.	• Convey the same message and concept in a new language.
• Start with a source text.	• Start with a creative brief.
• Often lack nuance of personal connections or considerations of tone.	• Inject creativity and cultural knowledge to better resonate with audiences.
• Done by translators, computers, or artificial intelligence.	• Done by writers, ideally native speakers from the same cultural heritage.

CULTURALLY DRIVEN
Visuals

Culturally driven visuals can further strengthen reach and resonance, and prioritize representation of your multicultural audiences. They can also greatly benefit people within your priority audience that have lower literacy, health literacy, and numeracy skills, and drive greater understanding of information to complement your messaging. Examples for visual materials may include videos, images/photographs, static or rich media content, print and outdoor/out-of-home advertisements. Key considerations for developing culturally driven visuals include:

- Choose visuals that portray positive and genuine representations of your multicultural audiences.
- Avoid images that appear too retouched or staged.
- Avoid charts or graphs that are overly complicated to understand.

Remember that visuals can't always speak for themselves. Choose visuals that support your main message and add clear headings, labels, and captions to emphasize the information or call to action.

Choose your images

In stock image libraries, there can be a notable lack of multicultural imagery. Selecting visuals that on the surface seem to be "diverse" and "inclusive" but are not truly representative of your target audience may be ineffective and potentially harmful. It is ideal to create your own original imagery/photography or footage/video that features your target audiences. Depending on factors such as time and budget, consider sourcing images from stock photo websites that prioritize multicultural imagery like Pexels or Nappy.co.

Best practices for selecting imagery

If it is not possible to develop your own imagery, use these best practices when researching and using images to enhance your communications.

✓Do:	✕Don't:
✓Work with community members, leaders, and those that have experience serving your target audience to develop or validate images that are culturally accurate, appropriate, clear, and inclusive.	✕Use traditional or cultural dress images unless the message is specific and appropriate to the customs, traditions, or cultural practices for your intended audience.
✓Select images that depict positive, health-promoting behaviors.	✕Include images that may depict unwanted or triggering behaviors.
✓Use images that will help your target audience better identify with your message.	✕Use images that could unintentionally imply that people are responsible for their own disparities in health outcomes.
✓Make sure images are accessible to people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency. Provide alternative (alt) text that clearly describes the image in English or additional languages. Make sure to follow Section 508 compliance.	✕Design visuals or text fonts that are "busy"—too bright, small, or voluminous. Visuals that are overly complicated in design or content can detract from your main message.
✓Consider the following characteristics when creating more diverse visual content: race and ethnicity; gender identity and gender expression; sexual orientation; body type; abilities; age; clothing; wealth indicators; concepts of family; and location.	✕Use images that could perpetuate negative stereotypes, including inequities in status, stereotypes or caricatures.

CULTURALLY DRIVEN
Outreach

Messaging and visuals can only be effective if they reach your target audiences. Different communities prefer different platforms for receiving information, but thoughtful outreach ensures the content you carefully crafted will resonate. Partnering with organizations that represent or serve your target audience will help you understand the most effective platforms to share your communications. When possible and appropriate, consider the best ways to compensate your partners for their time, and show gratitude for their efforts.

The right outreach partner can:

- Provide guidance for reaching your intended audience.
- Give additional credibility to your message.
- Extend the reach of your communications.
- Provide alternative channels to reach your intended audience.

To ensure buy-in from your community partners, remember to consult with them prior to and during content development. When possible, offer co-branding opportunities to share credit for the content and reinforce credibility to your materials. This co-creation gives you the opportunity to work with audience experts and will extend the reach of your communication.

Crafting Your Outreach

In addition to community partnerships, key considerations for multicultural outreach include:

- **Train the trainers.** Relationships with community organizations or faith-based groups can go a long way in delivering your message. Leaders of these organizations know and serve their communities and can lend visibility and credibility to your communications. Consider training leaders to become health advocates for your public health messages in their communities.
- **Take part in local events.** Consider engaging in sponsored or non-sponsored opportunities, such as community fairs or cultural festivals.

- **Be a partner on the record.** Make sure that you are available for interviews, panels, and town halls arranged by potential partner organizations or multicultural media. These media and on-the-ground partners provide existing reach, trust, and credibility within your target multicultural audiences.
- **Have a representative staff.** Having public health workers that can speak the language of your target audience is important. Multicultural media will often make requests for bilingual or multilingual subject matter experts, and this person can help answer questions your organization receives from the public.
- **Get creative.** Explore relationships across industries that may not initially feel like natural partners, such as labor organizations or local hobby clubs.
- **Choose communications channels with care.** There are many ways to share your message: print materials, social media, messaging apps like WhatsApp, and more. Consider how your target audience prefers to receive information. For example, some communities are rooted in oral traditions and may prefer video messages over text.
- **Leverage micro-influencers.** Micro-influencers have targeted networks on texting apps and social media. Consider neighborhood groups, community organizers, and local businesses as micro-influencers who can assist in engaging your target audience.

Connecting without the Internet

Thoughtful outreach methods are even more important when targeting individuals or communities without reliable Internet access. Consider engaging these audiences by:

- Setting up information booths at community events.
- Distributing flyers at local businesses or other high-traffic community locations.
- Creating radio, billboard, television, and/or newspaper advertisements.
- Using call or text alerts.
- Sending printed postcards or other direct mail materials.

DEVELOP A CULTURALLY DRIVEN
Communication Plan

Culturally driven communication is a strategy, not an afterthought. Build your communication plan from the start with culturally driven strategies to strengthen relationships, credibility, and impact. As you create and activate your communication plan, don't forget to ask yourself:

Messaging
- What are the cultural norms, nuances and values of the audience that I want to reach?
- Have I considered the historical context and barriers my audience has faced, related to healthcare or public health?
- Does this message need translation or transcreation?
- Is this message in the correct tone for my audience?
- Is my message plain language with a clear call to action?
- Is this message appropriate for the health literacy levels of my audience?
- Has a trusted community member seen and assessed the messaging?

Outreach
- What types of partner relationships should we authentically and meaningfully cultivate?
- How can we create mutually beneficial relationships with our trusted partners?
- How will our outreach efforts advance our public health goals across multicultural audiences?
- What measurable results do we aim to achieve?
- What is our timeline of activities and have we created a detailed action plan?

Visuals
- What is the purpose of the visual and how is it adding to the message I want to convey?
- What cultural references should I include? Which should I avoid?
- What colors and symbols are appropriate for this audience?
- Have I ensured that the visual is accessible to everyone?
- Has a trusted community member seen and assessed the visual?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON
Culturally Driven Communication

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC provides resources and guidelines on health communication, including resources related to cultural competence and health disparities. Their website offers information on communicating with diverse populations effectively, including information on inclusive images.

National Institutes of Health (NIH). The NIH conducts and supports research on various health topics. Exploring their website and databases, such as PubMed, can help you find relevant research articles on culturally competent communication in public health.

Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (OMH) Think Cultural Health Program. The Think Cultural Health website provides information, continuing education, and resources for healthcare professionals to learn how to deliver culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE). SOPHE is a professional organization dedicated to promoting health education and communication. They offer resources and publications on effective communication strategies for diverse populations.

American Public Health Association (APHA). APHA is a professional organization that focuses on public health. They provide resources and publications on health communication, health disparities, and cultural competence.

Health Communication Capacity Collaborative (HC3). HC3 is an internationally-focused organization dedicated to improving health communication practices. They provide resources and tools for culturally appropriate communication in public health.

Public Health Communications COLLABORATIVE

About PHCC

The Public Health Communications Collaborative (PHCC) creates and amplifies tools, resources, and learning opportunities for communicators designed to address public health issues, build public confidence, and identify and counter misinformation. Initially formed in August 2020 to provide science-based messaging resources on the COVID-19 pandemic, today PHCC supports communicators on a range of timely issues across the field of public health—working toward a world where everyone has access to the information they need to make good decisions about their health.

As a collaborative, PHCC draws on the expertise, insights, and on-the-ground knowledge of its partner network and public health leaders. Four Organizing Partners steer the collaborative: CDC Foundation, the de Beaumont Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and Trust for America's Health.

in Public Health Communications Collaborative

hcn

About HCN

HCN is a full-service, culture-first and data-driven social impact agency that delivers communications, marketing, PR, and advertising "in the air", as well as "on-the-ground" partnerships, capacity building and outreach. Their team of cultural communications experts focuses on one mission: to build sustainable ecosystems that improve quality of life for multicultural communities.

In addition to being a full-service cultural agency, HCN is a hybrid organization that also serves as the largest producer and syndicator of content and programming focused on health equity and social determinants of health in the US. HCN operates 3 owned networks: Multimedia (TV, radio, print, social, digital), Stakeholders (CBOs, FBOs, advocacy and civic groups) and Health Workers (MDs, RNs, and Community health workers), with a measured audience of 8 million weekly.

in Hispanic Communications Network