

Communicating Public Health in Washington: A Communications Plan

Developed By:
Public Health Improvement Partnership
Communications Committee

Executive Summary

What: A communications plan designed to increase public understanding of, and support for, public health in Washington through the use of a new research-based identity platform.

Why: Research shows public health is not well understood by the public. In order to successfully achieve our public health mission in Washington, public health employees at the state and local level can help educate key audiences about what public health is and isn't and how it contributes to the health of our state.

Who: This plan is designed for use by leaders and communicators in local and statewide public health agencies and other organizations involved in public health in Washington.

When: Now! The new identity platform and messages are already being used by some organizations around the state. New tools will be available for your use in fall of '02 and can be put to use immediately.

How: Read on! This plan gives you step-by-step ideas and tools to implement the new public health identity platform.

Developed by: The PHIP (Public Health Improvement Partnership) is a statewide coalition of public health agencies, convened under the auspices of the Department of Health in Washington State. PHIP is charged with the responsibility of assessing public perception of public health and designing and implementing improvements as needed across the state.

Background & Research

Two studies were conducted in 2001 to assess public knowledge, understanding and perceptions about public health in Washington.

In the first study, the Gilmore Research Group conducted four focus groups with the general public and 30 key informant interviews with the business community, public health partners and elected officials.

In the second study, ResearchWorks conducted an internal leadership workshop, a review of local media coverage and collected data from the general public, leadership workshop attendees, business owners, elected officials, the media and non-governmental health partners. The data was collected via in-person surveys, focus group discussions and telephone interviews. The results of all data collected were synthesized and used to develop the Public Health Agency Identity platform.

Research Summary

| Name of research study | Description | Purpose | Methodology | Findings |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| Exploration of Public Knowledge of Public Health Services | Qualitative study conducted in April 2001 by Gilmore Group | Designed to evaluate public perception of public health services | Focus groups, key informant interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding about public health • No connection between well known services and public health • Emphasis on local • Serve all people • Protect health through empowerment |
| Public Health Agency Identity Building for Washington State PHIP | Qualitative study conducted in July 2001 by Research Works | Designed to explore themes and approaches for communication | Focus groups, key informant interviews, media audits, telephone interviews and internal leadership workshops | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep it simple • Make it flexible and modular • Products were suggested |

All information collected was used to develop the identity platform, which is a simple statement that can be used with all audiences to communicate the key themes of the research.

The purpose of the identity platform

- Help public health agencies better define, identify and convey to a wide variety of audiences who they are and what they do and don't do.

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- Build a unified perception across Washington State of what public health agencies are and aren't to the very important and diverse audience they serve.
- Provide tools and the research rationale for consistently communicating public health agencies' identity through their programs, products, services and materials.

Why is an identity platform needed?

As the research showed, the general public is not aware of the important role public health agencies play. When critical public health situations arise, such as a disease outbreak or a vaccine shortage, the public does not currently make the connection between a local health agency and the response to public health issues in the state. The research also showed that people were not aware of many of the services public health provides.

In an increasingly tight budgetary environment, the general public and special audiences, such as policy makers, need to understand the role of public health agencies. Through this understanding, critical resources such as funding, staff, volunteers and recognition can be ensured. Internally, already scarce resources must be stretched ever further to accomplish a growing set of societal health needs, many of which didn't even exist 5, 10 or 20 years ago.

How does an identity platform benefit local agencies?

- Easy to use, customizable templates for communication needs
- Creating a consistent statewide image of public health through these tools
- Effective way to meet goals and objectives of programs
- Educate your audiences about value and importance of public health
- Research-based tools for credibility with all your audiences

In order to educate the public about who and what public health agencies do, it is important to establish a consistent identity for public health in the State of Washington. The identity platform is intended to accomplish this. It is not intended to replace current logos or taglines used by each local agency, but to integrate with and support existing agency efforts.

Goals and Objectives

Communications goals are the desired outcome of the communications plan. They are the targets against which progress can be measured.

The goal of the identity platform is to increase awareness and understanding of public health and the role public health agencies play in delivering public health services.

Implementation Goals

- Attain 100% participation from public health agencies in using the identity platform
- Train public health workforce to become effective ambassadors of the identity
- Establish a consistent image of public health in Washington through the use of the identity platform in communication tools

The goal of increasing awareness and understanding of public health agencies will not happen overnight. Starting with internal audiences and building support, this effort will require an ongoing commitment and communications effort that, over time, will move public health agencies in the direction of strengthening their unique and strong identity.

Using the Identity Platform

What is an identity platform?

The identity platform consists of an overarching theme and supporting ideas that explain public health's mission. It was developed using consumer, stakeholder and public health employee input. The identity theme is:

“Always working for a safer and healthier Washington.”

This statement reflects what both internal and external audiences felt was valuable and unique about public health agencies in Washington. The theme is supported with three key ideas, or sub-themes, that answer the question of “how?” These sub-themes are:

- *Essential programs for improving health*
- *Information that works*
- *Protecting you and your family every day*

These ideas represent the concepts that consumers, stakeholders and public health leaders and employees felt were the most valued and unique about public health.

How do I use the identity platform?

The identity platform can be used in all of your materials. At the most basic level, it is language that helps connect your agency and programs to the value of public health in the state. Some agencies have already begun using it and a few examples are provided below.

The identity theme phrase, *“Always working for a safer and healthier Washington”* can be used as a headline in an ad, in brochure or news release copy, on PowerPoint slides, in speeches, in radio and TV spots, on signage, etc. In order for it to be effective with the public, it should be included consistently on as many communications pieces as possible.

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Here are some examples:

Transit ad:



Program brochure copy:

“The communicable disease control program is one of the many ways that the Southwest Washington Health District is always working for a safer and healthier Washington.”

Website copy:

Public Health - Seattle & King County's Food Protection Program is always working for a safer and healthier community through education and the regulation of food service establishments.

In Seattle and King County, there are nearly 10,000 "permitted" permanent food establishments, including restaurants, food and espresso carts, coffee shops, delis and the fresh food sections of grocery stores. Each of these establishments has owners, managers and employees who have passed a test on handling food safely and received a food worker card. In addition, Public Health Environmental Health Specialists inspect establishments several times each year and, if requested, offer an educational session for staff.

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How do I use the identity platform with my own agency's logo and identity?

The identity theme is designed to support your agency's identity—not replace it. The examples above illustrate how some organizations have used the theme to describe the work of their agency in their community.

What tools are available for my use?

In fall 2002, several tools will be available. Items currently in development include:

- PowerPoint show for external audiences that talks about public health and can be tailored for your agency
- PowerPoint slide template artwork
- Print ad template artwork

Six easy steps to implement the identity platform in your communications:

1. Identify communication pieces in which you could add the new identity theme. Consider: website, brochures, flyers, news releases, banners, PowerPoint presentations, speeches, reports, PSAs or advertisements.
2. As you reprint and update materials, add the identity platform language.
3. When creating materials for specific audiences (like policy makers, media, or business leaders), consult the “messages at a glance” chart for tailoring messages (see page 9).
4. Visit our web site to download ready-to-use tools like boilerplate language, a PowerPoint slide template and a print ad template.
5. Launch the new identity platform internally at your agency and train employees on its use. A training presentation will be available on our web site by June 2003.
6. If you need assistance, or want to discuss the use of the identity platform, call one of the members of the PHIP Communications Committee (roster is in **Appendix A**).

Audiences

Different audiences have different information needs. For instance, a member of the media relies on a public health agency as a resource when covering a story on a disease outbreak. A policy maker may need information about how your local agency fits into the statewide or national public health network. Ideally, you want to educate both about the value and unique nature of the work your agency does in public health.

The following chart outlines key audiences and the desired outcome for each:

| Audience | Desired outcome |
|--------------------------------|--|
| General public | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the value of public health and how they benefit• Support and participate in public health initiatives |
| Business leaders | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the value of public health and how their business benefits• Support public health as a partner when applicable |
| Policy makers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the value of public health and how the public benefits• Understand public health’s critical functions, network and funding structure |
| Media | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the value of public health and how the public benefits• Use public health leaders and communicators as resources when covering stories |
| Partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the value of public health and how they benefit• Serve as ambassadors for public health |
| Public health agency workforce | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand and use the identity platform in daily work• Serve as ambassadors for public health identity |

Different audiences respond to different messages. The chart on the following page shows the various target audiences and what information and themes are important to them (based on the research). This chart will help you develop those messages that will most effectively support the overarching theme of how public agencies are **“always working for a safer and healthier Washington.”**

Identity Messages by Target Audience At-A-Glance

| TARGET AUDIENCES | IDENTITY SUB-THEMES AND MESSAGES BY TARGET AUDIENCE (Shaded cells are priority messages for that specific audience) | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| | Essential programs for improving health (Improving Health) | Information that works (Information) | Protecting you and your family everyday (Safety/Security) |
| General Public (Key Idea – you are safer and healthier) | Making your community a healthy place to live, work and play | Trusted information for healthy communities and healthy choices | Public health programs, working to protect you and your family every day |
| Business community (Key Idea – investments that work and local community) | Public health agencies –an investment that works for better health solutions | Public health agencies – objective information for making healthy choices at home, work and play | Public health programs – investments that protect your community’s health and safety everyday |
| Policy makers – Elected Officials (Key Idea - essential for their local constituencies) | State and local public health departments – an essential network for a safer and healthier Washington | State and local public health departments – science-based information for essential health decisions | Public health programs – essential investments for helping communities meet their health needs |
| Media (Key Idea – reliable resources) | State and local public health departments – science-based programs from experts who know your community | State and local public health departments – reliable resources for essential health information | A statewide network of health professionals working everyday for safer and healthier communities |
| Partners (Key Idea – essential resources and networks) | A network of programs and people essential for improving health | Reliable information for better health programs | Public health professionals working together everyday for community health |
| PH workforce (Key Idea – essential and effective people and programs) | Making Washington a healthier place to live, work and play | A reliable source for statewide health and safety information | Public health programs and professionals – protecting you and your family every day |

Tactics

Overview

Tactics are the communications activities and tools that will incorporate the new identity platform and can be used by public health agencies to help educate audiences about public health in Washington.

The tactics recommended in this plan were developed with input from the PHIP Communications Committee. In meetings and discussions representatives from many different public health agencies and organizations felt these tools would meet the following criteria:

- Effectively educate key audiences
- Tools that could be easily used and tailored by individual agencies and organizations
- Best use of limited resources

Each of the tactics discussed in this section is designed for your use—whether you are in a local health jurisdiction, at DOH or in another organization that supports public health education and activities. This section is designed as a roadmap that will help you to use these tools and ideas in your own public education work.

Tactics are organized into two sections:

- Internal: tools for use with internal (public health employee) audiences
- External: tools for use with external audiences (all other audiences)

INTERNAL TACTICS

Web-based Resource Library

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Description | A website where you can download tools discussed in this plan, as well as research, reports and other materials that relate to the work of the PHIP. |
| Purpose | Creating a central “clearinghouse” for materials will ensure you always have access to materials you want to use in your communications efforts. |
| Audiences | Employees conducting communications at public health agencies in Washington. |
| How to use it | When the website is live, you will be given access to the site and can download any tools you would like to use. |

Public Health Employee Training Module

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|----------------------|--|
| Description | A training session for public health employees designed to educate them about the identity platform, how it was developed and why using it in their everyday work benefits their program(s) and the public health network in Washington. The training module will consist of a PowerPoint show and talking points. |
| Purpose | To educate employees about the platform and how to use it. Public health employees will be encouraged to use the ideas and messages in the platform in their daily work. Ideally, this training, or an abbreviated version, would be delivered to all public health employees in Washington. |
| Audiences | Public health employees. |
| How to use it | PHIP Communications Committee members will conduct regional trainings using this training module. Leaders in public health agencies who receive the training will then be able to train others within their own organization. |

Internal Implementation Tool Kit

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|----------------------|--|
| Description | <p>A kit designed to help public health leaders and communicators to use the identity platform within their own organizations. Kit elements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tips for using the new identity platform internally • Examples for how to incorporate messages into job descriptions, job announcements, employee orientation, staff meetings and internal newsletters • Tips and examples for incorporating messages into existing publications and materials, email signatures, voice mail or on “hold” recordings, signage, etc. <p>All of the tools include examples of how to use the platform in these materials or venues. The kit will provide everything a public health representative needs to implement an internal education campaign. The campaign should coincide with employee trainings on using the platform.</p> |
| Purpose | To integrate the new identity platform into public health agencies in order to promote consistent use of the messages with all external audiences. |
| Audiences | Public health employees |
| How to use it | The kit will be used to aid public health representatives in educating their own organizations about the platform and how to use it. The kit should be used to help plan and execute internal education about the identity platform. |

EXTERNAL TACTICS

Standard Language

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|----------------------|---|
| Description | Standard language is a paragraph of text that can be used in a variety of materials to describe public health and the public health network in Washington. A set of basic talking points will be developed from the standard language for use when talking to groups, reporters, etc. |
| Purpose | Using consistent and research-based language to describe public health in Washington will create a unified image and promote better understanding among key audiences about public health and its important work. |
| Audiences | This language is suitable for all audiences because it is general. If you are developing materials for a particular audience, you can tailor your text using specific audience messages found in the chart on page 9. |
| How to use it | This language can be used in many ways. Here are some examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use in news releases as boilerplate language at the end of the release. • Use in newsletter articles and publications when discussing public health and how your agency contributes to the health of the state. • Use in public service announcement copy – for TV, radio, print or transit. • Use in program materials to briefly connect how the program supports public health in the community and in the state. |

Graphic Template

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| Description | A graphical look and feel for using the identity platform. The graphics will include colors, fonts and a basic layout that you can use for any materials you would like. The template will be designed for use by public health agencies and should be tailored with your logo/name and contact information. Two templates will be available immediately (others may follow): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PowerPoint master slide • Print ad template |
| Purpose | Using a consistent “look and feel” for the design of materials discussing public health will support the identity platform. With consistent use, audiences will begin to recognize information about public health and will remember the look and the messages. |
| Audiences | The graphic template will be appropriate for all audiences. |
| How to use it | To begin with, you will be able to utilize the templates for PowerPoint presentations and for print ads. You can also replicate the “look and feel” in other publications, brochure, flyers or materials as you would like. The template is intended to carry your organization’s logo as the organizational identity, and also to create a consistent look and feel across the state for public health. |

PowerPoint Presentation & Speaking Notes

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|----------------------|--|
| Description | A presentation suitable for many audiences that discusses public health and the public health network in Washington. The presentation will use the identity platform and key messages to describe public health. It can be tailored to include specific information about your agency or organization and how you lead public health initiatives in your community and contribute to public health in the state (and country). |
| Purpose | To educate key audiences about what public health is (and isn't) and how the public health network serves all citizens. |
| Audiences | Business, general public, policy makers and partners. |
| How to use it | The presentation can be used in many venues. A few examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City council/county commissioner meetings • Chambers of commerce • Rotary, Kiwanis, and other service clubs • Schools/universities • Community forums • Health care committees/groups |

PSA Campaign

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| Description | Public service campaign ads designed to educate the general public about what public health is (and isn't) and about the public health network in Washington. The campaign would include radio spots and print ads. All PSAs would be designed to feature the local agency's identity and logo and would be implemented locally by agencies interested in conducting such a campaign in their community. |
| Purpose | To educate the general public about public health in Washington. |
| Audiences | Business, general public, policy makers and partners. |
| How to use it | Print and radio ads will be provided for use in your community. Radio stations and some print publications provide free public service time for PSAs. To investigate this in your community, follow these easy steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call radio stations and local newspapers or community publications and ask if they accept public service announcements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If you have a media guide for your area, it will provide information on submitting PSAs to stations. • Send the PSA to the station with a brief cover letter requesting that the PSA be placed in the station's PSA rotation. • Call to follow up and find out if the station is running the spot. • If you have any advertising or public education dollars, you can buy a schedule on a station and ask for PSA matching spots. This is an excellent way to ensure your PSA is running during key times. • Print publications don't always provide free PSA space. If you |

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|--|--|
| | <p>find your local papers don't do this, ask if they have a non-profit advertising rate. Other publications you can contact include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community newsletters of organizations like chambers of commerce, non-profits, community centers, health care organizations, advocacy groups, educational organizations, etc. |
|--|--|

Public Information Kit & Templates

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|----------------------|---|
| Description | A basic information kit including fact sheet(s), backgrounder, Q&A and a news release template. The kit will be designed for local tailoring and use. |
| Purpose | A public information kit is an important tool in educating reporters, policy makers and other key audiences about public health. This kit will allow you to provide these audiences with background about public health and the public health network in Washington. |
| Audiences | Media, policy makers, partners, constituents and other audiences as needed |
| How to use it | <p>The kit will be available electronically. You can insert your contact information, information specific to your agency and programs and any pertinent community information. The news release template will be ready for agency tailoring and use. When your kit is ready:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give to reporters in person during a backgrounder meeting. This type of meeting is useful in educating reporters about public health and your agency, so when they cover a story, they have a solid knowledge base. Meet with new reporters in your area to educate them as soon as they start work. • Send to reporters with a news release. The public information kit can be sent with a news release to help provide background and context. • Give to reporters at a news conference. If you hold a news conference for breaking news or an important announcement, the public information kits can be used along with your news release. • Give to policy makers as background information or when you meet with them on a specific public health issue. • Use with other audiences that need more in-depth information on public health. |

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Brochure

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| Description | A general brochure about public health and the public health network in Washington. |
| Purpose | To provide public health agencies with a general brochure they can use to educate key audiences. Agencies that use the brochure can print their logo and contact information on it. |
| Audiences | Business, general public, policy makers, partners |
| How to use it | This brochure can be displayed in your offices and clinics. It can be distributed in brochure racks throughout your community at hospitals, community centers, churches, schools, information centers, city hall, etc. The brochure would also be appropriate to include in public information kits, with policy maker communications, and in any special mailings to businesses or other audiences. |

Measurement and Evaluation

Why do we need to measure the communication plan?

Measuring progress toward the communications goals will help the PHIP to make enhancements and adjustments to the plan. This is a highly visible effort, requiring resources and commitment from the entire network of public health agencies. Measuring the knowledge and awareness of public health among key audiences will be important to local public health agencies as well as the entire collective effort. Better understanding and improved support will make a difference for public health at all levels.

How do we measure the communication plan?

The overall communication effort should be measured in two different ways:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the tools and tactics
- Evaluate the outcomes (changes in understanding, perceptions and knowledge)

Evaluating the effectiveness of the tools and tactics outlined in this plan will be done by surveying public health leaders and communicators and by tracking how many agencies use the tools.

Evaluation measures for the tools and tactics in the plan:

- Hits to the website resource library
- Collecting anecdotal feedback from local public health agencies about the utility, effectiveness and results of the tools and plan in their community
- Tracking the number of trainings, presentations and public exposures for the Identity Platform
- Keeping track of the number of media stories generated and number that contain some element of the identity platform
- Using a training evaluation form following internal training sessions

Evaluating outcomes is a longer-term activity. The PHIP Communications Committee will work with public health agencies to do this work over time.

Evaluation measures for outcomes:

At the agency level:

- Evaluation tools that will be available on the website include such items as comment cards and brief surveys. Public health agencies can use these tools to survey their own audiences about their understanding of public health.



We'll need your help to evaluate this important work. Please keep track of the activities you initiate and any results you can easily measure. The PHIP Communications Committee will be in touch with you to get your feedback on this plan and the tools provided with it.

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At the statewide level:

- Repeating the key informant interviews and focus groups after 18 months to two years will help to measure progress towards changing perceptions and levels of understanding about public health across the state.

Appendix A

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