Disseminating Rural Health Research to
Community, State and National Audiences

A COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT FOR HEALTH RESEARCHERS

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ABSTRACT

This communications toolkit is designed to facilitate dissemination and use of rural health services research. The toolkit is a resource for researchers to enhance communication and dissemination efforts. It includes approaches for both developing various research-related documents and disseminating research results. The toolkit is designed to be a straightforward, easy-to-use reference guide for health researchers; it highlights common methods of packaging and dissemination information that were identified as important by key target audiences (e.g., policy makers, national health related organizations). The toolkit is based on information from the Rural Health Research Gateway's National, State, and Community Audience Needs Study Reports, the RUPRI Health Panel meeting summary, and other resources.

SECTION 2
INTRODUCTION

Health services research, when appropriately funded, coordinated and disseminated, plays a critical role in addressing problems related to the nations' health care system.[10]

Health services research provides essential information that informs decisions regarding health care structure, financing, quality, and accessibility. There is a growing body of research-generated knowledge which explicitly focuses on better understanding these challenges within the specific context of rural health care delivery. To maximize the contribution of this body of knowledge, this communications toolkit presents approaches that can be used to enhance information dissemination, with the ultimate goal of informing a range of important audiences, from local rural hospital administrators to federal policymakers. This toolkit, a product of the Rural Health Research Gateway, informs efforts by rural health researchers to extend the reach and impact of important findings. This includes using innovative strategies and tools for designing interventions to reach different target audiences and promoting knowledge-driven rural health policies and programs.

The content presented in this toolkit draws on approaches and framing outlined in two documents: Healthy People 2010[1] and the Framework for Knowledge Transfer[2]. Healthy People 2010 recommends querying target audiences to better understand their information needs. Many of the strategies incorporated in this toolkit are the product of querying key audiences, including congressional health staff; representatives of community, state, and national organizations; and agencies with an interest in rural health research (e.g., the National Rural Health Association, state Medicaid directors). Through focus groups and conference calls, Rural Health Research Gateway staff obtained information from these key audiences in order to identify effective communication strategies and share them with rural health researchers. Additionally, the Rural Health Research Gateway uses the Healthy People 2010 strategy of creating databases to catalog research studies and partner with existing dissemination networks to make data publicly available, as seen at www.ruralhealthresearch.org.

The second document that informs the structure of the communications toolkit is the Framework for Knowledge Transfer (FKT).[2] This framework recognizes that the dissemination and implementation of research findings are complex processes requiring multiple methods and tools. The framework includes three major processes: knowledge creation and distillation, mass diffusion and targeted dissemination, and organizational adaptation and use. The plan embedded in the FKT and adapted for the communications toolkit includes six important elements: 1) research findings and products, 2) end users, 3) dissemination partners, 4) communication, 5) evaluation, and 6) dissemination work plan.

Consistent with the FKT, the purpose of the communications toolkit is to guide researchers to plan for dissemination as a key component of initial research designs, culminating in the

application of findings by end users. It is also designed to assist with establishing direct links to diverse target audiences.

 Unless otherwise noted, the sources of information presented in this toolkit are representatives of community, state, and national organizations, and policymakers who met with Rural Health Research Gateway staff via in-person and teleconference meetings in 2006, 2008, and 2009. These target audience representatives were presented with sets of questions and dissemination strategies, as well as examples of research products. They were specifically asked to share their views about information packaging (e.g., policy briefs, fact sheets) and dissemination approaches (e.g., listservs) that would enhance the likelihood that rural health research would be obtained and considered by their respective organizations.

SECTION 3

DISSEMINATION PLAN

Dissemination involves a more active, tailored process of communication with a goal of persuading users to adopt the innovation.[11]

Communication planning is the process of focusing the right messages on the right audiences at the right time. A plan helps to ensure efficient and effective communication of rural health research.

Dissemination Planning Tool

A guide[3] available on the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ) Web site helps researchers to develop a dissemination plan, highlights of which are presented here. A dissemination plan facilitates the translation of research into practice. AHRQ's dissemination plan includes six major elements.[2]

Graphic 1. Six elements of a dissemination plan

The communications toolkit uses elements of the ARHQ communication plan to provide a framework for the content of the toolkit.

1. Research Findings and Products

In this toolkit, several dissemination products are discussed, including:

- Promotion pieces
- Fact sheets
- Policy and findings briefs
- Final reports
- Web sites
- Presentations
- Exhibits
- Health trade press and other media

2. End Users

While different target audiences (end users) may share an interest in the same research findings (e.g., health care providers, policymakers), specifying the primary audience and their needs provides focus for the dissemination plan and helps tailor information for use by a variety of audiences. The primary audiences for this version of the toolkit are health researchers interested in informing policymakers, and national, state, and community organizations.

3. Dissemination Partners

Rural health researchers should develop partnerships with community, state and national organizations, who serve as information brokers to their respective audiences, thereby amplifying the reach of research findings to target audiences.[4]

For Rural Health Research Centers funded by the federal Office of Rural Health Policy, a major dissemination partner is the Rural Health Research Gateway. The Gateway features rural health research conducted by the Rural Health Research Centers and presented in a variety of formats. Information includes summaries of research projects, both underway and completed, along with fact sheets, policy briefs, and other publications resulting from the work of the research centers. Additionally, contact information for the researchers as well as their areas of expertise are provided.

Table 1: Rural Health Research Center Dissemination Partners

Organization	Communication vehicle	Contact
Rural Health Research Gateway	Searchable Web site, flyer, research alerts	info@ruralhealthresearch.org
Rural Assistance Center	Searchable Web site, listserv, newsletter	info@raconline.org
Office of Rural Health Policy	Web site	Michelle Goodman, Communications Coordinator (301) 443-7440 mgoodman@hrsa.gov
Rural Health Research Centers	Web sites	Each center
Kaiser Family Foundation	Kaiser Daily Reports	dailyreports@kaisernetwork.org
American Hospital Association	AHA News Now	Mary Ann Costello, editor (312) 893-6877 mcostello@healthforum.com
Modern Healthcare	Magazine, e-mail alerts	Jessica Zigmond, rural reporter (312) 280-3130 jzigmond@crain.com
National Rural Health Association	NRHA eNews, Journal of Rural Health	Lindsey Corey Communications manager (816) 756-3140 x17 lcorey@nrharural.org

4. Communication

The more sources from which a message emanates, the more likely it is to be heard and incorporated into planning and decision making.[5-7] Effective dissemination relies on the use of varied channels - e.g., publications and reports, Web sites, listservs and other electronic communications, conferences, hearings, person-to-person communications, and information networks. Consideration should be given to all of these channels and formats to ensure that

the widest possible target audience is exposed to research findings presented in formats conducive to a variety of audiences.

5. Evaluation

Evaluation can help determine the impact of dissemination strategies. While research dissemination is typically measured by the number of peer-reviewed publications and presentations, other dissemination approaches are also highly relevant.

A few examples of dissemination impact include:
- Number of requests for information from the policymaker audience[5]
- Number of Web site visits and type of visit, including unique visitors, page views, average visit length, and entry and exit pages
- Number of presentations to policy, provider, payer or academic audiences
- Speaker evaluations from conference presentations
- Survey of end users of research to determine how they have used the research
- Number of products produced and disseminated (i.e., fact sheets, policy briefs, reports)

6. Dissemination Work Plan

The dissemination work plan provides the framework for organizing the dissemination strategy. The work plan includes immediate and longer term action items, a time frame for products and who is responsible. The work plan also includes information about the resources needed.

SECTION 4

EFFECTIVE TITLES

By improving the way research evidence is presented, researchers increase the chances of having their research inform policy and management decision making.[12]

After putting tremendous effort into conducting research and writing extensive reports, document titles are often too technical or academic to be easily understood. However, interesting and accurate titles often determine whether or not a document is read.[6] Given the importance of the title to the potential reach of a document, researchers should devote adequate consideration to developing clear and effective titles.

General Guidelines:
Titles should be **relatively short**. Readers should be able to quickly scan the title and determine their interest in the document. Short titles also protect against having important parts of the title truncated by electronic systems which allow/display a limited number of characters. While short titles are desirable, there are other considerations for writing effective titles. The key is to strike a satisfactory balance.

- Titles should be **descriptive of the content** of the document and give potential readers a specific idea of the focus of the document.

- **Key words** in the title spark interest and ensure "pick up" by internet search engines.[8,9]
  - **Good:** *New Opportunity for Rural America*
  - **Better:** *New Funding Opportunities for Rural Economic Development*

- Titles meant for a broad audience, including policymakers, should be **written in non-academic language and avoid technical terms**. Technical titles do not capture the attention of diverse audiences and make it less likely the paper will be read.[9]

- Well-written titles **reflect the key "takeaway points"** and appeal to broader audiences. To garner attention, the "so what?" factor should be clearly and succinctly communicated in the title.
  - **Good:** *Rural People Have to Travel Farther for Care*
  - **Better:** *Longer Distances to Care Result in Poorer Rural Health Outcomes*

- While titles should capture audience attention, efforts should be taken to **avoid over-stating** the significance of the research findings.[9]

- **Avoid acronyms and abbreviations**. Using acronyms or abbreviations in titles and headlines depends on the audience and context. If the prospective audience is familiar with the acronym (e.g., using EMR in a health care journal) and spelling it out makes the title too long, then abbreviations may be used. If using an abbreviation or acronym in a

title seems the best option, delineate the meaning of the acronym in the first sentence of the document.
- o **Good:** *Bridging Silos, Part II: DI, SSI Initiatives*
- o **Better:** *Bridging Silos, Part II: Disability Insurance (DI), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Initiatives*

- **Two-part titles** are sometimes useful for complex topics or to pair a descriptive title with something a little "catchier."
  - o **Good:** *Health Care Affordability for Low-Income Americans is Out of Reach*
  - o **Better:** *Out of Reach: Health Care Affordability for Low-Income Americans*

- **Avoid long noun strings** in titles. A common problem with titles is a list of nouns that is hard to sort out. Adding a preposition or two can help resolve this ambiguity.
  - o **Good:** *Medicaid and SCHIP Children's Health Status Roles*
  - o **Better:** *The Roles of Medicaid and SCHIP in Children's Health Status*

SECTION 5

PROMOTIONAL PIECES

It is useful to think of all audiences as 'decision makers' since 'decisions' are what might be improved with research evidence.[13]

Brochures, flyers and other promotional pieces are common communication tools. To make them effective communication tools, the following points should be kept in mind.

Layout
- The layout should attract - and keep - the attention of the audience.
- A clean and simple layout can be powerful.
- A one-page flyer as opposed to a tri-fold brochure has greater usability.[8]
- Visuals directly related to the research findings help to communicate the message and decrease the need for text.
- Bullets break up text and make information easier to read.
- Narrative should have enough "white space" around the text.
- Content should be divided into topic sections with topic headers to help the reader find information.

Photos and Graphics
The selection of photos and graphics should be deliberate since they serve as vehicles to communicate the messages.
- One large photo or graphic usually communicates better than many small ones.
- A photo reflective of the research subject helps readers quickly identify the research focus.[33]
- Color brings the document to life.[8]
- Generic clip art is often interpreted as outdated or amateurish.

Fonts
- Use 10-14 point size.
- Use easy-to-read fonts for the text.
- Set captions in a different style (such as italics).[33]
- Avoid using too many caps, italics and bolds.[33]
- Use no more than three different fonts.[33]

Text
Text presentation is an important part of overall design. Too much text (or all text) can deter the reader from reviewing the promotional piece.
- Skip details. Provide just enough information to prompt readers to ask for more.
- Provide information that the reader needs to or wants to know.

- Write in short, interesting paragraphs (some paragraphs may be only one sentence) and in simple, non-technical language.[33]
- If technical terms are used, be sure they are defined.
- Include contact information.[8]
- Include a list of work done by the research center.[8]

Paper Selection

A few points are worth noting about paper used for printed documents:
- The "white" parts of photographs printed on colored paper will become the color of the paper and can distort the photograph.
- For display rack use, consider a heavier weight paper.
- Use lighter-weight paper for mailers or bulk mailings.

Web Version

Creating a Web-based promotional piece is an eco-friendly alternative to paper. Web products can be easily e-mailed to large audiences and forwarded on to others. It is important to ensure the product is compatible with multiple e-mail systems before sending.

Consider obtaining input from a graphic or Web designer when developing promotional pieces. Most university printing centers have designers who can help design and create publications.

SECTION 6
FACT SHEETS

Research in the form of "ideas," not "data," is what most influences managerial and policy decision-making.[14,15]

Typically, fact sheets are one-page documents (can be front-to-back) that provide basic information in an easy and quick-to-read format. Fact sheets are particularly useful to national state, and community policymakers who have limited time and who need clear and concise information to inform their decision-making. Fact sheets are easy to distribute via listservs, e-newsletters and other communications with audiences, without requiring much repackaging.[4] While some research study findings may not be applicable for a fact sheet format, other research may generate multiple fact sheets.[26]

Content
- Use a compelling title.
- Write in lay terms.[26]
- The fact sheet should be a stand-alone (self-contained) document where complex ideas have been simplified. Do not refer to a previous document or assume people remember the information.[27]
- Text should be brief; present tense and active language should be used.[27]
- The most important information should be put in the first paragraph – e.g., describe the issue, related implications, and the main message(s).[8] These implications could be highlighted or put into a stand-alone box at the top of the document.[4]
- Minimize the methods section.[9]
- Use terms consistently.
- Use numbers and percentages when presenting numerical information.[8]
- Contact information should be readily visible and on the front page.[8]

Layout
- Use 10-14 point font and a two-column format.[8]
- The document should begin with the words "Fact Sheet," followed by a very brief headline explaining the subject in lay terms.[9,26]
- List the date the fact sheet was produced.[8]
- Use bullets, white space, bolding, text boxes and relevant color graphics to emphasize important points.[9,27]
- Use one or two key graphs in color (colors need to translate to readable variations in shading when printed in black and white).[8,9]
- Simple graphs and charts provide information at a glance. Pie charts are the easiest to understand.[8]
- Graphs should print clearly from electronic versions.[8]

- Use adequate white space (i.e., less dense text on the paper)[9] and headings and subheadings to keep content clear and easy to read.[8]
- Color images are important and should be relevant to the topic. Scenic pictures or other graphics that look nice but don't add content shouldn't be used (waste of space, color ink when reprinting, etc.).[9,33]
- Provide references and electronic links for more information.[8,27]

Availability
- Fact sheets should be printed on thicker, heavier stock paper.[9]
- A primary information resource on rural health research is the Internet. Creating electronic versions of fact sheets (such as Web pages and .pdf documents) will allow users to access and share information quickly and easily.[4]

SECTION 7

POLICY/FINDINGS BRIEFS

Decision makers rarely use a regression coefficient to help them solve a particular problem. Rather, over long periods of time, ideas enlighten decision makers about a particular issue and how to handle it.[16]

Policy and decision makers need to know why research findings should matter to them. It's essential to quickly tell the audience what the story is about and why they should keep reading. Policy and findings briefs are relatively short analyses that present research results and link them to policies and programs. Policy and decision makers do not have time to cull through extensive reports. Many do not have background knowledge to understand policy implications of research findings unless links are clearly made and the context and meaning are provided. Briefs include context for the research, key findings and policy recommendations. They are generally six pages or less in length. Briefs summarize original research results and frame content in a user-friendly way, emphasizing conclusions, implications and/or recommendations *rather than study methods*. Policy briefs are viewed as one of the most useful dissemination tools.[4,9]

Briefs should be:

Professional, Non-Academic – Community, state, and national audiences are interested in research findings, perspectives on the researched problem, and potential solutions based on new evidence. Research methods and analytic techniques should not be prominently featured.

Succinct - Few policymakers have time to read lengthy reports. A policymaker should be able to read and understand the main points in a very short period of time.
- Keep the brief to two pages, up to six if needed.[8]

Understandable – Enough detail should be provided for those who want to understand the issue with greater depth, and the main points should be expressed clearly enough to be grasped easily and quickly.
- Create a brief, attention-grabbing subject line when disseminating via e-mail.[34]
- Provide research findings in the context of public policy programs.[4]
- Information should be self-contained/stand-alone and the reader should not need to refer to other documents for core content.
- State-level information (presented in a table, for example) is highly valued by state and federal policymakers.[4,8]
- Avoid placing too much or highly relevant information in footnotes; few readers consult these.

Easily Navigated – The reader should be guided through the brief from the beginning to the end of the document.
- Use headings and subheadings to keep content clear and easily readable.[8]
- Put findings at the beginning rather than at the end of the document.[34]
- Use short sentences and short paragraphs.[33]
- Avoid using jargon OR acronyms. If they must be used, include a brief explanation.
- The most important information should be put in the first paragraph – e.g., describe the issue, related implications, and the main message(s).[8,9] These implications could be highlighted or put into a stand-alone box at the top of the document.[4]
- The most direct Web site address to access the brief should be provided rather than a general Web site.[9]
- List contact information prominently (preferably on the front page).[8]
- Include a reference list and other related documents, including a location to access the full research report.[8]
- A primary resource for information on rural health research is the Internet. Electronic versions of policy briefs (e.g., Web pages and .pdf documents) allow users to obtain and share information quickly and easily.[4]

Visual – A visually attractive policy brief creates a favorable impression (e.g. professional, innovative).
- Use formats such as box highlights and bullets.
- List the key findings/policy implications/impacts and introduction on the first page.
- Use adequate white space (i.e., less dense text on the paper).[8,9]
- Use one or two key graphs in color (colors need to translate to readable variations in shading when printed in black and white).[8,9]
- Color images are important and should be relevant to the topic. Scenic pictures or other graphics that look nice but don't add content are unnecessary and shouldn't be used (waste of space, color ink, when reprinting, etc).[9,33]
- Graphs should copy clearly from electronic versions.[8]
- Ensure the document prints well in both color and black and white.[34]
- If the document contains high-resolution photos or graphics, it may be too large to send via e-mail. Consider posting it on the Web and providing a link, or creating a Web version that can be e-mailed.[34]

SECTION 8

FINAL REPORTS

Attracting users to the product rather than pushing it on them enhances the dissemination effort.[17]

Final reports are important to audiences that need a significant level of detail, including how the research was conducted (e.g., hypotheses, data, methods, statistical analysis) so they can have confidence in how the conclusions were reached. Final reports lend credibility to shorter, more concise documents such as fact sheets and policy/findings briefs.[9]

The Internet is the primary source for people searching for rural health information. It would benefit researchers to make final reports available to clearinghouse sources such as the Rural Assistance Center and other national Web sites.[34] The Rural Health Research Gateway can assist you with this.

Abstract and Executive Summary Recommendations[9]
- Both abstracts and executive summaries should be part of final reports.
- The abstract is important as it may determine whether the executive summary and the full report are read.
- Abstracts and executive summaries should be able to serve as standalone documents and include relevant citations, reflected in end notes and/or footnotes.[27]
- Executive summaries can be placed on the Web site with a link to the full report.
- Policy and practice implications should be embedded within the first few sentences.[4]
- The executive summary should be tightly written and bulleted for quick reading and not exceed three pages.[8]
- Research methods and analytic techniques are minimally featured.
- Each section of electronic copies of final reports should be individually printable (e.g., the executive summary, abstract, methods, statistical tables).

Final Report Readability[8]
- Begin with an overview of the study and key findings.
- A table of contents is very helpful for readers to quickly find information of interest.
- Color can make the report more visually interesting.
- The report should be available electronically.[4]

SECTION 9

WEB SITES

The process of implementing any research outcome begins with awareness, when potential users learn about the products, tools or findings.[18]

The primary resource for information on rural health research is the Internet.[34] People like to access information quickly and will often utilize search engines such as Google, or go directly to familiar Web sites. Site structure and content should be developed with primary Web site audiences in mind. Content should be evaluated to determine whether it is engaging, relevant and appropriate to the audience. Provide a link to your Web site whenever possible, such as in your e-mail footer, business cards, reports, and PowerPoint slides.[34]

Shareability / Web 2.0

Users want the ability to quickly and easily copy, forward and send things they find interesting. For content posted online, adding RSS feeds and share functionality, which allows documents to easily travel from one user to others, helps increase the visibility of the content.

Most sharing tools are displayed as buttons on Web pages. A user goes to a Web site, chooses to share or bookmark the content, and then clicks on the sharing icon to begin the process. Sharing might include posting the link to Facebook, Twitter feeds, or other sites included under the general umbrella of "social media" or "Web 2.0." This results in others seeing the posted link, which may include comments as to why the link is important. Bookmarking the page to a social bookmarking destination allows users to retrieve the data at a later point in time and also assign metadata to the content for easy search and retrieval.[35]

Many of the recommendations provided below, generally intended for independent center-specific or project-specific Web sites, also apply to Facebook profiles, Twitter feeds, or content posted to any other Web 2.0 site or content-sharing service.   There are a couple of additional items to keep in mind, however, specific to using social media tools:

- When creating a Facebook profile for your center or project, take advantage of the free FBML application which allows administrators to create customized HTML tabs, customizing the look and feel of your profile and maintaining brand continuity across media. For an example of this, see the customized tabs on the Rural Assistance Center's Facebook profile: http://www.facebook.com/RAConline
- When posting content to Facebook or Twitter, use a personal tone and voice. Audiences of these sites expect and appreciate content that reads as though it's written by humans rather than institutions or machines.
- Social media are designed to operate on a communal level. Keep this in mind and make an effort to interact with users on these sites. Doing so increases the probability that your profile or posts will develop a formal following and that your products will spread

in a viral manner (in this case, this is a good thing. Viral dissemination occurs when users share your content with their individual networks, and so on, potentially resulting in many individuals reading, viewing, and/or using your content in a short period of time).

- Contact Rural Health Research Gateway staff for additional recommendations and information.

Credibility[29]

- Identify the sources of information provided on the site, including sources for specific projects.
- Information about the staff, including credentials, highlights expertise.
- Regularly update the site; date Web pages and publications so users can assess its currency.
- Provide contact information for posted documents, including mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address.
- Respond promptly to inquiries from users.
- Verify that the site is easy to navigate. Check links on the site regularly and fix or remove broken links.

Content

- Web users often want to access specific information quickly. To facilitate this, make Web content easy to scan:
  - Limit the use of prose on Web pages. Keep sentences and paragraphs short and to the point.
  - Use bulleted lists to break up text and make important points stand out.
- Lead with the most important information on Web pages. (See Section 12 for information on writing in the inverted pyramid style.)
- Use active voice for more direct and concise wording.
- Do not use jargon; use language familiar to the audience.
- Define acronyms and abbreviations when introduced, even for pages intended for an expert audience. Complete words are preferable to abbreviations.
- Proofread pages and use spell-check.[29]
- Use descriptive document titles and consider including brief descriptive information about the document to help users determine relevance.
- Provide links to other important rural health sites, particularly the Office of Rural Health Policy, the Rural Health Research Gateway, and other research centers.[9]
- Links to summary documents as well as full documents are highly effective means for meeting the needs of audiences with different levels of information needs (e.g. Government Accountability Office Web site, gao.gov).[9]
- Time document postings on the Web site strategically to coincide with any announcements or media releases about the document. If the document is not available when someone first receives a notice about its release, chances are they won't look for it again.

- Consider sending e-mail alerts to interested parties when something new, such as a final report, is posted on the Web site.[9]

Navigation and Structure

- Focus on user needs and goals in organizing the site, rather than your organization's preferences.[29]
- The home page should explain the site's purpose and create a favorable impression of the site's quality.
- Provide a link to the home page on every page of the site.
- Make the site's most important content available from the home page.
- Give users the ability to search the site from the home page.[4,9]
- Label links with meaningful phrases. Do not use "click here" as a link label. Link labels should match labels on the destination page.
- Use category labels that are descriptive, unique, and clearly represent the content of the category. Avoid meaningless phrases like "new ideas" or "10 ways." Avoid the use of acronyms in category labels.
- Place important information, such as navigation options, consistently throughout the site in easy-to-find locations. [29]
- Use descriptive, concise titles for each page on the Web site.
- Put the most important information near the top of the page.
- Provide a clickable table of contents for long pages.
- Use many descriptive headings to help users scan Web pages.[31]
- Structure pages with data such that users can easily understand trends and relationships. Use charts, tables and other graphics appropriately, to help audiences understand the information presented. When using tables, use clear and concise row and column headings.[31]
- Tables and graphs should be easy for readers to extract.
- Provide a site-wide search option and check that search results are useful to users.[29]
- Use a site map showing the site's hierarchy to help users find content.
- Utilize free tools such as Google Analytics to track Web site traffic and usage patterns.

Design

- Avoid using all caps (i.e., upper case) for text; mixed case is easier to read.
- Use familiar fonts in at least 12-point for better legibility.
- The appearance of links should be consistent throughout the site and the color and formatting of links should be distinct from text that is not clickable.
- Change the appearance of visited links so users can recognize where they have been.
- Use images only when they add value to the site content. For example, "thumbnail graphics" of report covers (i.e. small-sized reproductions) can be used as clickable links to the documents.[4]
- Provide text equivalents for images and other non-text content.
- Do not use pop-up windows or graphics.[29]
- Include an option to skip repeated content, such as navigation links.

- Be cautious in the use of color and contrast. Ensure that the design is functional for those with low-vision or color deficiencies.
- Test the site on the most common browsers and on Macs and PCs.
- Ensure the Web pages print properly on standard size paper.
- Ensure the Website is functional on smart phones such as the BlackBerry and iPhone.[34]

File Management
- Keep the Web addresses (links/URLs) for items on the Web site as short and simple as practical. Longer links shared by e-mail may not work correctly if the line containing the link breaks. Web addresses that are difficult to type are harder for users to share.
- Give each resource a permanent location on the Web site. When updating a resource, continue to use the same file name. This way search engines, Web sites that are linked to the resource, and individuals who have bookmarked the resource will continue to find it.
- When a resource must be moved to a new location on the Web site, provide a redirect that notifies users of the new location and takes them to the resource.
- Keep page size, including images, below 30KB to speed download times.

SECTION 10

PRESENTATIONS

If a picture is worth a thousand words, a good story is worth many columns of statistics. Stories present ideas, conflicts, and sometimes, resolution. They have depth and dimension, drama and emotion, making them more memorable than data alone.[19]

Presentations are useful for describing research results and for engaging dialogue about the findings. Briefings on new research findings help audiences such as policymakers focus more fully on the topic.[9]

Presenting to Policymakers and Other Decision Makers

- Select a location convenient for the target audience.
- Give ample notice before and about the event.
- Organize the presentation around a specific topic or issue to be discussed.[8]
- Briefings should be kept under one hour (2/3 of time for findings and 1/3 of time for questions and answer session) and provide current information.[8]
- Start on time and stay on time.[8]
- Present the most important information at the beginning to accommodate people who need to leave early.[8]
- Panel presentations should provide balanced and diverse views.[8]
- Focus on policy recommendations.[8]
- Anticipate and prepare for questions and structure the presentation to spark discussion.[8]
- Information packets that cover presented material should be available.[8]
- PowerPoint handouts with accompanying notes are the most useful.[9]
- Include references on slides.[9]
- Make individual graphs (with notes) available electronically.[9]
- Meeting content should be accessible through electronic archives available on Web sites allowing for a larger audience to access the information/presentation. This also allows for a better understanding of the presentation as opposed to simply posting PowerPoint slides.[9]
- Consider using 'opinion leaders' or local 'influencers' as credible sources for communicating your research. The closer the source of communication to the world of the decision maker, the more influential is the communication.[20]

Six Steps to a Successful Presentation[21]
To ensure that remarks are relevant to the target audience, write presentation objectives that address the following:
- What will be accomplished?
- What will participants learn?

- What difference will materials make?
- What will participants be able to do?

Design the Opening
- Be very cautious about using jokes
- Introduce self and credentials
- State length of session
- Summarize the meeting agenda if there is one (breaks, etc.)
- Summarize the structure (how/when questions will be taken, etc.)

Prepare the Presentation
- Is the content beneficial to the audience?
- Is content adequately and clearly stated?
- Does the presentation relate to the purpose/objectives?

Develop Visual Aids
- Professional appearance (with organization's logo, brand)
- Light PowerPoint slide background
- Dark type
- Keep text to a minimum
- Limited number of bullet points that serve as prompts

Design the Ending
- Review the learning objectives
- Connect content to each objective
- Thank participants
- Ensure time for questions

Rehearse
- Time presentation and adjust material if over allotted time.
- Practice to avoid heavy reliance on notes.

Miscellaneous Do's and Don'ts
- Don't turn your back to the audience or face/read from screen
- Make frequent eye contact
- Arrive early to check AV, microphone, etc.
- Speak slowly – don't rush
- Jokes are discouraged (appropriate stories are okay)
- Stay on time
- Turn off pagers/cell phones

Question and Answer Session
- Repeat question for clarity
- Answer directly to the point of the question
- Inquire as to whether the question was fully answered
- It is okay to admit you don't know the answer. Offer to find the answer and be certain to get back to the individual.

SECTION 11

EXHIBITS

Think of a graphic like a highway sign – it goes by fast and the driver doesn't get a chance to study it. The information has to be easily absorbed.[12]

A well-designed exhibit stands out and gets your message to your target audience. The average exhibit attendee spends 7 to 8 hours over a period of 2 to 3 days visiting an average of 25-31 exhibits. This leaves 5 to 15 minutes per visit. This gives you only 5 to 15 minutes to make a lasting impression.[22]

Effectively exhibiting at conferences or other events requires more than putting up a display and laying out publications. Exhibits alone do not fully communicate messages; they simply serve as background. Exhibits are most valuable when people involved with the project are present during exhibit hours and engage in dialogue with attendees. Exhibit hall conversations with key audiences can help generate interest in rural health research. Provide long-lasting giveaway products, such as pens, sticky notes or mouse pads, to "remain in the brain" of conference attendees after they have left the exhibit hall.[34]

Display[22]

- Graphics on exhibit displays should be simple, intriguing, use minimal text and give a sense of your organization. Detailed information can be provided via brochures/booth staff.[23]
- Exhibit attendees have time to look at graphics, not read paragraphs. Go for impact over information through the use of big, bold images and concise text.
- Ensure that the words on the exhibit are legible; that text is not too small, has high contrast with the background, uses a font that can be easily read, and presents information that is not hidden by other exhibit components.
- Graphics should be sharp. Use a high resolution file or the graphic will appear grainy.
- Ensure that the exhibit look like it represents the same organization as your other audience touch points – such as your Web site, brochures or report covers. Integrated marketing communications are more memorable than completely different looks in different mediums.

Researchers are Part of the Exhibit

- Be at the exhibit during exhibit hall times and wear a name badge.[24]
- Communicate effectively with as many people as possible.[24]
- Start a conversation such as "Are you familiar with the Rural Health Research Centers program?"
- Have a sign-up sheet available for attendees to sign up for any available e-communications.

SECTION 12

HEALTH TRADE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

Your audience will want to know why the subject you are writing about matters or should matter to them. It's essential to tell them quickly what the story is about and why they should pay attention.[12]

The media plays a significant role in setting the country's social and policy agenda. News coverage of health issues is perhaps the greatest single source of health education in the United States. Coverage of an issue by the mass media suggests that the public has a concern about the issue. Because of this, policymakers and others track the mainstream media to learn what their constituents are seeing, hearing and reading.

While researchers are often concerned that the media will sensationalize or trivialize findings, strategies can help prevent this from happening. If research staff are unable to simplify study findings, ask university communications or public relations staff to assist in translating findings. Additionally, communications staff can help attract initial attention to a study and serve as a resource to both the research team and media.[9] In mass media, issues are framed by compressing science, facts and arguments; it helps to use compelling, concise language and analogies to ensure broader coverage of research findings.

Ensuring that media representatives know they can get accurate, timely information from research staff is important and can be accomplished by building relationships with reporter(s) that typically focus on health content.

Distribution Lists
- Assemble contact lists (with phone numbers, email addresses, etc.) of trade, local, regional, state and national media for use in distributing news releases. Releases should be distributed via e-mail unless otherwise specified.[25] National health-related organizations typically have publications/newsletters (e.g., AHA News Now). Short features on research will result in broader distribution of findings.

Newsworthiness
- Some media focus on policy implications of research findings, making it important for researchers to consider this link between their research and policies and programs.[9]
- Research is more likely be covered by mainstream media and trade press if it has one of more of the following qualities:
  - timely, addresses current concerns;
  - policy implications that are explained in the paper;
  - information is relevant to the readership;
  - an unusual or different approach to an issue.[28]

News Releases

News releases are the quickest, least expensive and most widely used means of initiating media coverage. Sending news releases simultaneously to several news outlets increases the likelihood of coverage.[28]

Format

At the top, include the organization's name, a person to contact, e-mail address, and all possible day, night and weekend contact numbers, as well as the release date. Most news releases say "For immediate release," followed by the date.[28]
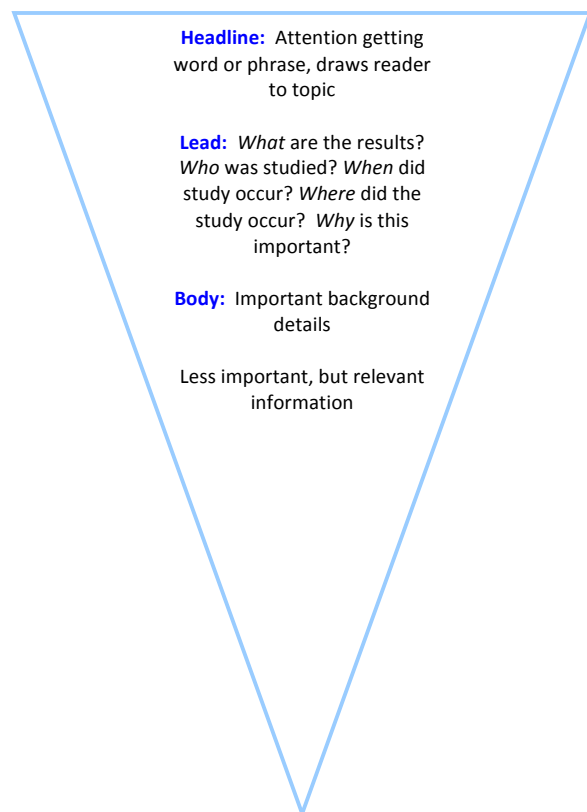
- Insert a brief, attention-getting headline. Titles on press releases can inhibit or facilitate the uptake of research findings by the media. They require significant attention (being careful not to oversell) in order to maximize the likelihood that findings will be reported.[9]
- The news release should be as short as possible (ideally one page) and relay essential information.
- A brief description of the research organization should be at the bottom of the news release.
- The symbols "###" or "-30-" denote the end of the news release.[28,30]

Writing a News Release

News releases, like most newspaper articles, are designed to have the most important information at the beginning. News releases should serve as a mini-article that the media can easily use; not just a couple of sentences with a link to a full report.[9] See an example of a news release template on page 29.

- Common concise language should be used. The less complex the message, the more likely is its adoption.[5] Ask individuals unfamiliar with the research to review for clarity.
- Use the Inverted Pyramid
  - The first sentence, or lead, should contain the basic who, what, when, where, why, and how.[28]
  - Follow with background information.
  - End with less important information.
- Accuracy is essential, but this does not

Graphic 2. Inverted Pyramid

Headline: Attention getting word or phrase, draws reader to topic

Lead: *What* are the results? *Who* was studied? *When* did study occur? *Where* did the study occur? *Why* is this important?

Body: Important background details

Less important, but relevant information

27

preclude using language that evokes emotion.

- State policy implications clearly. Keeping with the objectivity of a scientific paper, policy implications are stated in terms that do not advocate a position.
- Limit and identify all acronyms and do not use jargon.[30]
- Key messages should be readily apparent in a rapid review of the news release.[9]
- Use the Associated Press Stylebook (www.apstylebook.com). It outlines the standard news writing style used by most newspapers.[30]
- The best time to send a news release is early in the week and early in the day.[9]
- Convey information relevant to local audiences when possible.[34]

Media Interviews
- Remember, members of the media interview researchers who are considered experts. Interviews provide an excellent opportunity to convey important research findings to a broad audience, including policymakers and other decision makers.

Guidelines to Ensure a Positive Working Relationship:
- Be available for interviews.
- Promptly return reporter's phone calls.
- Be very attentive to reporter's requests and help meet deadlines.
- Be ready at any time; media requests almost never come at preferred times.
- Assume that everything said can be quoted. Parts of sentences – even words or sentence fragments that are totally out of context – can be used.[25]
- Have the executive summary and other supporting documents ready for release. This can make the difference between the research story running in the media the same day or not running at all.[9]

Take Time to Prepare
- Be able to explain the importance of the study in one sentence and have that sentence written down for reference during the interview.
- Convey the most important information at the beginning of the interview.
- Plan up to three main messages to get across during the interview.
- Identify ways to explain findings that are easy to understand (i.e., analogies).
- Prepare evidence or examples.
- Think of possible questions and related answers.
- Prepare a brief outline for yourself – two or three sentences – describing the study.

During the Interview
- Interviews go by surprisingly fast, so deliver main points at the beginning.
- Be quotable. Offer a strong statement that summarizes the main point in plain language.[28]
- Listen carefully to the question and take time to formulate the answer; an example or analogy may be used to clarify.

- Be concise and keep language simple (no jargon). If needed, stop and rephrase an answer.
- Explain how the research findings affect people/programs.[28]
- Volunteer important information; waiting for the reporter to ask isn't necessary.[28]
- Be precise and ensure accuracy in conveying findings.
- If complete information is not yet available, tell the reporter when information will be available and then provide it.
- Don't use "no comment" or "I'm not going to speculate" as it implies that something is being hidden.
- Get back to reporters with answers (keeping deadlines in mind).
- Always stay "on the record" when speaking to a reporter.

Follow Up
- Provide the reporter with contact information in case of further questions.
- Consider suggesting colleagues who can give the reporter an independent appraisal of the work and its importance.
- Ask when the interview is expected to appear in the publication/radio/TV.
- Expect the occasional error or misquote; complain only if it is extremely serious. Start with the reporter.[28]
- Call, mail, or e-mail reporters to convey appreciation once the story has run. This helps to solidify a working relationship and opens the door for future media opportunities.

SAMPLE News Release Template:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 22, 2008

Wendy Opsahl, Communications Coordinator
UND Center for Rural Health
(701) 777-0871, wopsahl@medicine.nodak.edu

Native Elders Lack Health Insurance and Access to Care

GRAND FORKS, N.D. – American Indian and Alaska Native elders experience vast challenges with regard to health insurance coverage and access to care. A recent study finds that one out of four Native elders is uninsured. The misperception that Native elders' health care needs are fully addressed through the Indian Health Service, coupled with the scarcity of information related to health insurance coverage, contributes to increasing unmet health care needs and health disparities.

These findings are part of a report just released by the Upper Midwest Rural Health Research Center (UMRHRC), a partnership between the University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center and the University of North Dakota Center for Rural Health. The UMRHRC study looked at health insurance coverage and access to health care for Native elders, using data from a national survey of over 8,300 Native elders.

The study found a 20-fold difference in the uninsured rate between Native elders 65 years of age and older and the U.S. general population of the same age group (15% versus 0.7%). Native elders face low levels of adequate insurance coverage and, as a consequence, less access to needed health care.

One out of 10 Native elders reported they were not able to get care when they needed it during the preceding 12 months. Reasons cited included long waiting times (27%), transportation problems (26%), and cost (26%). Transportation is an especially challenging barrier to overcome for rural Native elders because, even if they have health insurance, transportation costs are often not covered by health insurance and reliable, affordable transportation may not be available.

The study calls for policies to increase health care access and aid to eliminate the health disparities experienced by Native elders.

"This report clearly demonstrates that accessibility must be addressed for this population," explained Alana Knudson, Ph.D., Associate Director for Research at the Center for Rural Health, University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences, and primary author of the study. "Policymakers must carefully consider the impact of health care costs and access on Native elders and their families, and look for solutions that address the financial, geographical and cultural barriers."

The UMRHRC is one of six rural health research centers funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Rural Health Policy. The UMRHRC combines research and information dissemination expertise to undertake national projects focusing on quality of rural health care.   A copy of the report and more information about the UMRHRC are available at: www.uppermidwestrhrc.org/

<div align="center"># # #</div>

SECTION 13

EVALUATION

A working dialogue among researchers, partners and users can improve how the research is applied.[2]

Until recently, evaluation of information dissemination strategies has been an under-explored area. Possible reasons for this are not knowing how to complete such an evaluation; lack of infrastructure for evaluation; and concerns about how evaluation results will be used.[16] Evaluating the success of dissemination efforts is an iterative process. Dissemination is not a one-time activity; rather, it is a long-term relationship with end users that provides ongoing feedback to help improve the likelihood of reaching and informing key audiences.

The Agency for Healthcare and Research Quality has a guide[3] to help researchers put together a communication plan. This is also helpful in evaluating the impact of the research dissemination plan.

Objectives of a dissemination plan and measures that can indicate whether the objectives have been met *should be articulated early in the research implementation phase*. Following the dissemination effort, questions such as the following should be considered:

Were dissemination goals met? Was dissemination a success? Are there measurable indicators for success?
For example: number of policymakers reached, number of Web site hits, number of inquiries received.

Representatives of target audiences can be queried regarding the value of the research via electronic surveys or other means. Researchers need to consider how end users will be involved in evaluating the dissemination activities.
For example: Obtaining feedback on how easy the research product was to use, or if the findings contribute to a change.

Issues to consider in evaluating success of the dissemination effort:
- How can the success of the dissemination effort be measured?
- How will contact with users and potential users be maintained?
- How will feedback from the users and dissemination partners be gathered?
- How will feedback be incorporated in future research and related product design?

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Simply Put, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guide to putting information in readable, plain language. The Simply Put guide contains tips for print materials, such as brochures and fact sheets, for use by any audience. Print messages are more effective when they are easy-to-read and attractive to audiences.
http://www.cdc.gov/communication/resources/resource_idea.htm

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, 2007 edition, for best results with most print and broadcast media, follow these usage and style recommendations. Perseus Publishing, Cambridge, MA. www.apstylebook.com

A Responsible Press Office, by Marguerite Sullivan; a pocket guide for government leaders and public information officials who want to create an effective mechanism of communication between the press and the government. http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/pressoffice/

Research-Based Web Design & Usability Guidelines Book, 2006 edition, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, provides detailed explanations of Web guidelines. Each guideline includes a rating for importance and citations to supporting research.
http://usability.gov/pdfs/guidelines.html

Xenu Link Sleuth. This free link-checking program identifies any links on your site that are not working correctly.
http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html

Firefox LinkChecker. This free extension for the Firefox Web browser identifies problem links on individual Web pages with a single click.
http://www.kevinfreitas.net/extensions/linkchecker/

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