

Building a Strong Foundation for Sustainability

Handout 6 - Communication

There are two general areas for communication and respect to supporting the goals of sustainability.

Internal Communication: communication directed at managing the work of a coalition, partners or planning group. Use a variety of methods (including Web sites, e-mails, Listservs, and social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs) to connect members to their organization and to one another. Regularly disseminate meeting agendas, meeting notes, e-newsletter updates, annual reports, and community action plans to keep members abreast of coalition progress.

Internal communication is important to sustainability because it:

1. Allows members to plan agendas and prepare for meetings
2. Creates a shared vision and promotes predictability, which, in turn, promotes trust
3. Makes the roles and expectations of each coalition member clear
4. Enables coalition leaders to track the work of members and program planners
5. Promotes coordination and collaboration among coalition members or work groups
6. Help motivate members by communicating a sense of success and forward movement
7. Updates members on work progress, which promotes a sense of accomplishment and success as well as commitment to the coalition mission

Major tasks to consider include the following:

1. Make draft agendas available several days before each meeting
2. Make meeting notes available soon after meetings; they indicate next steps, who is responsible for them, and when. For other meeting management suggestions, see <http://www.bookmeetingroom.com/effective-meeting-management>
3. Conduct effective face-to-face meetings or conference calls that observe effective meeting-management practices, which include running meetings with skilled facilitators who employ consensus-building and conflict-management skills
4. Develop and distribute to all coalition members clear, specific (who, what, where, when, and how much) action plans (long- and short-range) for accomplishing goals
5. Distribute to all members periodic updates, reports, or newsletters documenting the progress of coalition efforts and recognizing the accomplishments of individuals

Community-wide Communication: communication directed at keeping community members, leaders, and key decision makers up-to-date on the overall community health effort.

Effective external communication increases the visibility of your effort in the larger community and enables you to keep stakeholders, local leaders, and others in the community well informed about the organization's efforts and progress.

Community-wide communication is important for sustainability because it:

1. Promotes decision maker buy-in around your coalition, partnerships or long-term vision, mission, and plans
2. Conveys the sense that coalition, partner or organization funds and other resources are being used wisely
3. Improves name recognition (branding) and reputation
4. Increases awareness of potential funding or other resource development opportunities
5. Increases the likelihood of support for coalition or long-term strategies
6. Sets the stage for collaboration or coordination between organizations

Major tasks to consider include the following:

1. Develop media products for keeping the community up-to-date on organizational developments
2. Distribute newsletters by Web site or e-mail
3. Write and distribute impactful success stories that highlight the success of your work to key stakeholders
4. Use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)
5. Communicate regularly (person-to-person, phone, or e-mail) with community leaders on issues relevant to their interests
6. Write regular columns in community weeklies, newspapers, trade publications, or other relevant publications
7. Release periodic sustainability reports or annual action plans (print or electronic)
8. Publish annual reports highlighting current plans and progress as well as future strategies
9. Distribute personal e-mails from coalition members to contacts
10. Schedule appearances on talk shows (e.g., radio, TV, podcasts)
11. Present at civic organization gatherings (e.g., PTOs, Elks, Chamber of Commerce, school superintendents, local trainings, conferences) (See Promoting Interest in Community Issues, http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter_1005.aspx)