# COMMUNICATION NOTES

## DEVELOPING A DISSEMINATION PLAN

Developing a dissemination plan is a key part of the collaborative research planning process. Although the decision makers and researchers working together won't know the results of the research until it's completed, working through an initial dissemination plan can help your team focus the project and identify key audiences. When the research results come in, you'll be ready to flesh out key messages, review and finalize the plan, and then implement it.

Following is a list of some of the key elements that should be included in a dissemination plan. While this is not a detailed guide to developing a dissemination plan, it provides a good overview of some of the most critical things that should be considered.

### 1. Project overview

- Describe the current environment or context that provides the impetus for the research being undertaken — what is your research aiming to clarify or change? Who is or should be interested in the results?
- Briefly sketch out the research project and its objectives. How will it address the context or challenges you have identified?

### 2. Dissemination goals

- What are you hoping to achieve by disseminating this research? You may have a single long-term goal, such as a change in a policy, practice, or even culture, but make sure to also include any supporting or shorter-term goals.

### 3. Target audiences

- These are the groups you want to reach with your research results — and who you will target in your dissemination activities. Be as specific as you can — who are the people who can use this research?
- You may want to divide your list into primary audiences (more important) and secondary audiences (less important) and allocate dissemination efforts according to audience importance.

### 4. Key messages

- In your first stab at a dissemination plan, you won't be able to develop specific key messages because you won't know the results of your research project. However, you can plan broadly around what you anticipate the content will be.
- Effective messages explain what your research results mean, why they are important, and what action should be taken as a result. They are not simply a summary of the results. Note the wider context if applicable — how the results fit with the body of related research on the topic.
- Make messages clear, simple, and action-oriented. The style and content should be tailored for each audience. Messages should be based on what that audience wants to know, rather than on what you think it should hear.

### 5. Sources/messengers

- Since using influential spokespersons to spread your messages can help ensure uptake of your research results, identify the people or organizations that are viewed as credible with each of your target audiences.
- Then think about how you can get those people and organizations "on board" — maybe you can partner with them in a workshop, or ask them to include an article about your research results on their web site or in their newsletter.

### 6. Dissemination activities, tools, timing, and responsibilities

- This is the meat of your dissemination plan. Here you describe the activities (such as briefings or presentations) you will undertake to reach each target audience, and the tools (such as printed materials or web sites) that will support these activities. You also set out timing (what you will do first and when you will do it) and assign responsibilities to team members.

- Successful dissemination activities go beyond traditional vehicles such as publication in scholarly journals — look for activities that promote a two-way dialogue, not a one-way flow of information. Face-to-face meetings or briefings are a very effective way to reach decision makers.

- Make each member of your collaborative research team responsible for carrying out at least one dissemination activity, and schedule meetings to report back and ensure commitments are being met.

- A good dissemination plan will have activities that reach each of your target audiences, taking into account their attitudes, habits, and preferences.

### 7. Budget

- Time and budget requirements for dissemination are frequently underestimated. Effective dissemination involves resources and planning — think about travel, layout and printing, translation, equipment, and space rental costs when allocating a budget for dissemination activities. Don't forget to include resources the individual(s) will need to do the future planning and co-ordination of the activities you have identified!

### 8. Evaluation

- Evaluation is most effective when it is built in from the start. Decide how you will evaluate the success of your team's dissemination efforts, selecting measurable criteria for each dissemination activity. Focus less on efforts (how much you did) and more on outcomes (what was the result).

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