

Appendix A: Checklist to Build Trust, Improve Public Health Communication, and Anticipate Rumors During Public Health Emergencies

This [checklist](#) provides guidance for how to improve trust and communication in the context of an escalating public health issues.¹

Build Critical Communication Capacities

- Activity 1: Build and maintain a PHEPR communication workforce that is well-prepared and reflective of the community it serves
 - Identify and characterize existing PHEPR communication workforce assets
 - Establish and pursue avenues to remedy workforce gaps
 - Recognize and address threats to building and maintaining a PHEPR communication workforce
- Activity 2: Ensure that existing budgetary, operations, and financing approaches for PHEPR communication activities reflect prospective needs during an emergency
 - Understand current PHEPR communication funding
 - Curate alternative resources that may be deployed before or during a public health emergency
 - Prepare administrative strategies in anticipation of just-in-time emergency disbursements
 - Streamline bureaucratic and administrative processes that hinder responding in “feast-or-famine” financing conditions
- Activity 3: Know your audience and their history with public health
 - Discern audience characteristics
 - Understand intended audience’s history with public health and related institutions

Develop Meaningful & Lasting Relationships with Your Community

- Activity 1: Establish public health personnel as trusted members of the community
 - Assess readiness for community relationships
 - Identify key principles and norms for engaging with communities
 - Be immersed in community spaces and present at local events initiatives, and meetings
 - Build in mechanisms for sharing decision-making processes with communities

- Activity 2: Make strategic and intentional investments in building community**
 - Conduct assessments to understand community networks and needs to inform a plan of action
 - Establish a track record of supporting the community in a range of ways, even if small
 - Develop avenues for community members to integrate into the local public health community
 - Prioritize sustainability when building community relationships and evaluate progress

Create & Maintain Strong Partnerships with Secondary Messengers

- Activity 1: Create a strategy for maximizing the use of secondary messengers in public health communication efforts**
 - Conduct an assessment to understand needs of key partners and likely secondary messengers
 - Identify and engage with potential strategic partners for secondary messaging
 - Identify public health capacities and resources that can be leveraged as benefits to formal secondary messengers
- Activity 2: Develop formal processes to engage and incorporate secondary messengers into message development, distribution, and evaluation efforts**
 - Develop shared expectations with potential partners
 - Collaborate with partners on message development and distribution efforts
- Activity 3: Cultivate opportunities for informal sharing of messages**
 - Leverage informal secondary messengers in virtual spaces
 - Leverage informal secondary messengers in physical spaces

Anticipate Misleading Rumors & Potential Loss of Trust

- Activity 1: Enable appropriate understanding of what public health is and does**
 - Establish what public health is and its benefits to society
 - Clarify how government services—including the public health department—are organized
 - Explain the goals and thought processes behind public health operations
 - Plan robust public feedback mechanisms prior to an emergency

- Activity 2: Set expectations for public health response and communication at the start of a health emergency**
 - Help members of the public understand issues of uncertainty
 - Establish processes and plans to communicate changes in guidance as understanding evolves
 - Set an appropriate communication cadence
- Activity 3: Track, analyze, understand, and plan for anticipated rumors in local contexts**
 - Establish tracking and analysis systems for social listening
 - Integrate an understanding of local audience values and needs with expected rumors
 - Develop prebunking and inoculation messages
- Activity 4: Promote use of and access to trusted sources**
 - Facilitate access to trustworthy health information and teach critical thinking skills to enhance information self-sufficiency
 - Enhance information accessibility and understandability

Formulate Key Message Components & Maximize Message Engagement

- Activity 1: Draft key messages**
 - Embrace a basic content format for communicating accurate information in an emergency
 - Employ specialized approaches to confront rumors
 - Consider and apply lessons from existing messaging models
- Activity 2: Tailor messages based on understanding of the intended audience**
 - Identify intended audiences for messaging
 - Consider specific needs of the intended audience that may influence their perspectives on public health messages
 - Engage in dialogue to build trust, increase message effectiveness, and address rumors
- Activity 3: Ensure messages get to intended audiences via preferred channels and trusted voices**
 - Tailor channel utilization to increase engagement with intended audiences
 - Identify and integrate trusted messengers into messaging efforts to increase uptake and effectiveness

- Activity 4: Design messages using tone and visuals that will resonate with intended audiences**
 - Increase engagement by using eye-catching visuals and other formatting
 - Revise messaging content and tone to increase messaging reach
 - Sync message tailoring for maximum effectiveness
- Activity 5: Regularly evaluate the engagement and impact of PHEPR communication efforts**
 - Select and execute an evaluation process complementary to organizational goals and capacities
 - Link evaluation results to message development and tailoring efforts

References

1. Potter C, Nagar A, Fink E, et al. *Checklist to Build Trust, Improve Public Health Communication, and Anticipate Rumors During Public Health Emergencies*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security; 2024.