

# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR EBOLA

## 1 Agree on a Common Goal

- **Define clear long and short-term objectives.**
- **Establish shared objectives and partners.** This can be tough, as it involves negotiating competing political/economic interests and priorities.
- **Define an evaluation process** for revising strategies in real-time to meet these objectives.

## 2 Coordinate the Leadership

- **Identify one lead institution** to manage and reconcile the common goal, its priorities and resources, and all active parties in consultation with national and local governments.
- **Identify supporting credible individuals and organizations** to build confidence and trust among key audiences, including healthcare providers, the media, and the community.
- **Establish a strategic role** for public and private entities, the media, academia, and others.
- **Appoint a communication coordinator** to supervise all communications.
- **Remain flexible.** The disease is spreading, which will require rapid, nimble adaptation, message surveillance, and shifting of resources.

## 3 Develop a Communication Strategy

- **Prioritize the key messages to be disseminated.**
- **Prioritize the key audiences** for diffusing communication among multiple channels so that strategic alignment is attained.
- **Develop a detailed communication plan**, to be implemented by the communications coordinator, delineating who will deliver what messages, in which format, and with what frequency.
- **Recruit a credible and competent spokesperson** to provide a consistent face for the messages.
- **Recruit credible individuals or organizations as communication partners.**

*Prevent the rapid spread of Ebola*

*Long-term goals:*

- *Decrease the likelihood that someone will be infected with Ebola*

*Short-term goals:*

- *Educate public on ways Ebola is transmitted, and empower them to make informed decisions*
- *Assist public in making decisions by providing evidence-based messaging*

*Lead institutions:*

- *World Health Organization, United Nations, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Health and Human Services*

*Key messages:*

- *prevention strategies, how disease spreads, reduce panic and fear*

*Key audiences:*

- *health workers, media, the public*

*Credible community and medical liaisons:*

- *Heads of state and local health departments, executive branches of government (e.g. Mayors, Governors)*

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## 4 Launch a Communication Operation

- **Create mechanisms for message delivery.**
- **Consider new partnerships** with the private sector and NGOs to advocate and support the response.
- **Facilitate and build ownership** at the appropriate levels (e.g. sub-local to global) of the individuals or organizations.
- **Utilize existing media** with humility, openness and accessibility.

## 5 Maximize Communication Effectiveness

- **Engage your audience.** Develop messages that are visual, vocal, evidence-based, and, if possible pre-tested. Whenever possible, include members of target audience in message development and testing.
- **Be health literate** in developing materials.
- **Acknowledge and respond to emotions.** Avoid abstract or harsh language about deaths, injuries, and illnesses. Communicate with compassion, using simple, non-technical language and multimedia.
- **Track and evaluate the implementation of the overall strategy** in order to monitor communication patterns and identify successes and weaknesses. Be prepared to modify your message or your strategies quickly and effectively in response to evaluations.

### References

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*Modes of dissemination:*

- news briefs, TV, social and multi media, etc.

### Background

*The Ebola outbreak sweeping across West Africa is the longest, largest, and most widespread in human history. Scientists predict the outbreak will last 12 to 18 months, infecting hundreds of thousands of people before it is controlled. Strong communication at all levels is critical to containing the rapid spread of Ebola.*

*In September 2014, a group<sup>1</sup> reviewed communication strategies developed for the World Health Organization during the 1997 mad cow crisis to see what can be applied to the current Ebola outbreak. These communications strategies were developed to arm key audiences with a framework to help prevent the spread of Ebola.*

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