

System Review Communication Planning Template

This Communication Planning Template is intended as a resource document with guiding questions and sample goals, strategies and activities. Child welfare agencies (CWS) who are embarking on System Reviews or Analyses will want to create and customize communication plans with their community partners to work well in the local context and meet agency and community needs.

Communication Goals

Questions: What communication goals do you have for release of your System review? What are you most trying to accomplish? Be sure to consider how release of the review findings fits within your broader CWS efforts to reduce disparities in outcomes and/or implement the Child and Family Practice Model (Practice Model).

Sample Goals:

- Use release of System Review to Increase Understanding of the Barriers to Improved Outcomes in your Agency and to Engage Partners, Stakeholders and the Community in the Development of an Action Plan to Address Those Barriers.
- Use release of System Review to Share Findings and Place Report in Context of Broader Efforts to improve local CWS and reduce disparities in outcomes.

Audiences

Questions: Who are the audiences, internal and external, that are important to contact about System Review findings, and who would want to be the “first to know” about this report? Who are the stakeholders who have a vested interest in CWS and would be especially interested in issues impacting the target population(s) in your system review report? Be sure to include audiences who are both friendly/supportive of CWS as well as those who have been critical.

Sample audiences:

Internal

- Staff
- Social Worker Unions
- Managers
- Internal workgroups focused on equity issues for certain groups of people

External

- Budget and Policymakers for your agency (Governor, Executive Staff, etc.)
- Board of Supervisors and other elected officials
- Partner agencies and organizations
- Courts – Judges, Attorneys, CASA
- Tribes and Tribal leaders
- Community based organizations

- Children’s commissions or other community-wide child/family groups
- Task forces and organizations focused on equity issues for certain groups of people
- Advocacy organizations
- Youth-led organizations
- Parent Partners and other parent organizations
- Cultural Brokers
- Private providers
- Community leaders -- including Tribal leaders, Church leaders and community elders

Strategic Framework

Questions: What is your strategic framework for undertaking release of your System Review? How do you see release of the report in the context of the partners and community members who guided the review and/or who will be needed to design and implement improvements? Do you envision developing your Action Plan with them before public release of any System Review findings? What will guide the development and execution of your communication strategies? What is the role of the media and how do you see them fitting in your overall strategy? Be sure to be realistic about the ways in which you will approach release of the IA and what you can and will do to be successful.

Sample Elements for Strategic Framework:

- Use the System Review to deepen community relationships and engage partners in dialogue and development of targeted strategies for improving CWS outcomes.
- Use System Review to underscore open, transparent approach to improving child welfare.
- Ensure pro-active message support for System Review that frames findings and Action Plan in positive and constructive ways.
- Position the System Review as an invited means of CWS self-review that is intended to benefit all children in CWS but that focuses especially on targeted group(s) of children because data tells us they are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system and experience the worst outcomes.
- Use CWS top leadership to be “front and center” in owning results of the System Review, communicating with key audiences and visibly committing to making necessary improvements through Action Plan and other efforts.
- Use the System Review as a tool to increase understanding and support for efforts among those who set CWS policies and will provide funding for Action Plan (e.g., Legislature, Board of Supervisors, County Executive Staff, etc.).
- Use System Review communication planning as an opportunity to deepen collaboration and consistent messaging with Partner Agencies and others working to reduce disproportionality and disparities for vulnerable children and families.
- Use System Review as a tool to engage news media in educating policymakers and the public about what is needed to reduce disproportionality and disparities in CWS.
- Use System Review communication planning as a foundation for building a communication strategy for preparing agency, community and system partners for Installation and Implementation of the Practice Model.

Strategies and Activities

Questions: What strategies and activities will help you accomplish your communication goals?

Sample Strategies and Activities:

1) Message Development

Questions: What will you do to ensure that you have a set of concise and effective messages about your System Review? What do you most want audiences to know – and remember – about the System Review? Are your messages different for different audiences and thus require some customization?

Sample Activities:

- a. Review Key Themes emerging from your Agency's System Review and ensure that you understand them. Follow-up as needed.
- b. Develop your agency's Key Messages/Talking Points. Be brief and focus on a limited number of main messages, and then support those as necessary.
- c. Tailor messages as necessary for various audiences. Consider organizing audiences by Internal (managers, staff), External (Board of Supervisors, Partners, Community, Tribes), etc. Begin to consider who might be most effective in delivering those messages (e.g., Messengers) as you will need this to develop your Outreach Strategy (see below).
- d. If possible, work with System Review Report author to provide any summary information relevant to context and key CWS improvements for possible adaptation or inclusion in System Review Report and as means for informing framing of report.
- e. Prepare Q & A doc to help spokespersons and others be prepared for questions.

2) Agency Spokesperson Prep/Training

Questions: Who can be most effective in communicating about your Agency's System Review? What sort of preparation can you do to be sure that agency spokespersons are as prepared as possible to be effective? Be sure to consider role of CWS agency leaders in this strategy and in visibly "owning" the System Review and its findings.

Sample Activities:

- a. Identify spokespersons for internal and external audiences who can effectively discuss your Agency's System Review.
- b. Provide materials to spokespersons and conduct prep sessions. Identify any areas where additional message support is needed and expand/modify Key Messages as appropriate.

3) Materials Development

Questions: What materials can you produce that will be effective in communicating about the System Review? What materials work best with your audiences and stakeholders? Be sure to use your Key Messages/Talking Points to guide development of materials and help ensure materials are consistent and strategic.

Sample Activities:

- a. Identify materials that would be helpful in communicating about your Agency's System Review. Possible materials might include:
 - i. Short summary overview of System Review (depending on whether an Executive Summary is included in the original Report).
 - ii. FAQ.
 - iii. PowerPoint presentation – for use by spokespersons and others.

- iv. Fact Sheet including key local data about disproportionate representation and disparate outcomes of children and families being served (helpful to context setting).
- v. Fact Sheet summarizing current CWS initiatives to address disproportionality and disparities in outcomes in your agency, including planned implementation of the Practice Model (helpful to context setting).
- vi. Website copy that accompanies public posting of System Review Report on Agency website.
- vii. Articles for agency newsletters or other publications.
- viii. Other communication materials specific to your Outreach Strategy (see below):
 - 1. Staff communication – *Example:* All-Staff Email sharing findings and what Agency is doing in response to findings.
 - 2. Community communication – *Example:* Letter or Email from Director to community leaders, PPT tailored for presentation at Community meetings.
- b. Draft materials and secure internal review.
- c. Consider sharing draft materials with partner agencies and key community groups as part of broader collaboration strategy. Doing so will help to inform materials, enable common messaging and promote use of materials. Solicit input/feedback relevant to any needed changes in materials.
- d. Revise and produce final materials.
- e. Disseminate materials per Outreach Strategy below.
- f. Monitor need for updates to materials as outreach occurs and modify as needed.

4) Outreach Strategy

Questions: What are the outreach strategies for reaching your various audiences and stakeholders? How will you best communicate with and engage them? Which ones require more personal attention and briefing and which can be reached via broader outreach, conferences or forums? How can community and partner groups help? Be sure to consider these strategy questions in relation to groups with whom you do not already have a relationship but who are important to your success. (For example, you may need to enlist community leaders or “gatekeepers” to reach some parts of the community.)

Sample Activities:

- a. Develop Outreach Strategy based on your target audiences. Consider organizing your strategy by audience categories such as Internal (staff, managers), External (Board of Supervisors, Partners, Community, Tribes), etc.
- b. Identify the specific activities necessary to your outreach, including the following:
 - i. Review/confirm messages for specific audiences and modify if necessary. (See Message Development above).
 - ii. Who will be the most effective Messenger and help to better ensure that messages are heard in a way that lets you achieve your communication goals (e.g., Agency Director/Spokesperson or Deputy, youth, a partner agency, judge, community opinion leader)?
 - iii. What are effective ways to reach them? What are the activities (e.g., materials dissemination, one on one meetings, briefings, Brown Bag presentations, presentation at conferences, etc.)?
 - iv. When will you contact them? Are there existing meetings at which System Review findings/report could be reviewed and discussed?
 - v. Will you engage them in an ongoing conversation/set of activities or is this a one-time information sharing?

- vi. Who is staff lead for following up and making sure outreach occurs?
- c. Develop a Timeline leading up to release of System Review findings/report with specific activities and who is leading execution.
- d. Assess Outreach Strategy post-release of System Review Report and modify as needed. If your agency is moving toward installation and implementation of the Practice Model, consider the ways in which your System Review Communications Plan can inform broader communications planning.

5) Media

Questions: What is your strategy for dealing with the media? Can they help you achieve your communication goals? What are the factors that you need to be especially aware of in engaging media on this issue? Who are the media that can help you reach key audiences, including ethnic and community-based media? Be sure to work with your Agency's communications or public information officer in developing media plans and coordinating outreach; you'll want to ensure that any plans are in line with your agency's overall communication strategies. Be sure to address timing for any media release and ensure that CWS leadership is prepared for press questions that may arise. You'll also want to confirm that key stakeholders have been informed of the System Review ahead of public release and appropriately engaged.

Sample Activities:

- a. Determine media strategy in light of your communication goals/strategic framework and local issues, including current relationships with media and coverage (neutral, hostile, etc.). Be sure to include presentation to Board of Supervisors and other public bodies as potential opportunities.
- b. Once media strategy is determined, develop your media plan, including the following:
 - i. Target Media – Include regular media as well as community-based media that serve African American and Native American populations (may wish to identify faith-based media for outreach to African American population in particular).
 - ii. Messages – *Examples:* Develop Media Pitch Points, Internal Q&A if necessary (for dealing with thorny questions that may arise and that are not addressed in main Messaging/Talking Points document).
 - iii. Media Training – *Examples:* Prep agency spokespersons for media questions, practice with role-play, conduct on-camera or other training as needed and helpful.
 - iv. Third Party Surrogates – Identify individuals in the community, youth/parents, other agencies, local college professors, etc. that can speak to key issues within the System Review and who can help to humanize issues. These are individuals who likely have been involved in your Outreach Strategy and who you might quote in your News Release. You'll want to be sure to share key media materials with them and help prepare them for press calls.
 - v. Materials to be developed – *Examples:* Media Advisory, News Release, guest newspaper editorial, articles for magazines or other print outlets.
 - vi. Media Outreach Activities – *Examples:* Pre-pitching to select reporters, Feature or long-form exclusive print story day of release of report, embargoing report until morning of Board of Supervisors meeting when report is released, desk-side briefings, press briefing, e-dissemination, editorial board meetings/briefings, public affairs radio/TV programs, Media Roundtable for community-based media, etc.
 - vii. Timeline – Assign deadlines for key tasks and staff person who is responsible.

- c. Implement Media Plan – as determined above, including media prep sessions as needed.
- d. Monitor coverage and follow-up with any reporters as needed. Acknowledge stories secured and use opportunity to strengthen relationships with local reporters.
- e. Document and disseminate media coverage to audiences.
- f. Debrief media plan and use opportunity to inform future strategy and outreach, including Practice Model installation and implementation and other CWS plans.

6) Coordination, Collaboration and Accountability

Questions: Who needs to be part of your Communications Team – or will communication planning occur as part of your Practice Model Implementation Planning Team or some other pre-existing group? Who do you need to be sure is “at the table?” To ensure effective implementation, who is lead for overall coordination and ensuring that key activities are accomplished?

Sample Activities:

- a. Assemble a Communications Team for System Review planning and implementation. (This could be an ongoing group tasked with communications, but will need assistance from those with direct communications and media experience. Consider including the Agency communications officer or Public Information Officer as a member of the team, if possible, but if not, arrange for consultation and any needed assistance.)
- b. Produce a written Communications Plan using this Template or some other planning support tool so that goals, audiences, strategies and activities are clear.
- c. Use your communications planning as an opportunity to force strategic decisions upfront as opposed to just letting things happen or evolve. (The more intentional and strategic you are, the more prepared you can be and the more you will improve your chances for achieving the outcomes you want.)
- d. Develop a Communications Timeline that includes all planning and implementation deadlines and indicate who will execute key tasks.
- e. Meet regularly to check progress on key activities and identify any other needed tasks.
- f. After System Review findings/report is disseminated, debrief communications plan and identify lessons learned. Leverage your System Review experience for broader efforts related to Practice Model installation and implementation as well as other CWS initiatives and opportunities.

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