

Module 5: Applying Evidence

Table of Contents

Module Objectives 3

Evidence Application: What does *it* look like? 3

Developing a Communication strategy..... 4

 Step 1: Define your communication objectives 5

 Step 2: Identify and analyze your audiences 6

 Step 3: Developing Messages 6

 Step 4: Select the Channels to Use 7

 Step 5: Create a Work Plan..... 7

 Step 6: Implement your Communications Activities..... 8

 Step 7: Monitor & Evaluate your Communication Activities 8

Additional Resources and Useful Links 8

Module Objectives

At the end of this module participants will be able to:

- Identify indicators of evidence use
- Know steps for developing a communication strategy
- Describe objective, outcome, and audience for a communications strategy for their policy issue
- Draft a communications strategy for their policy issue including messages, channels, and evaluation

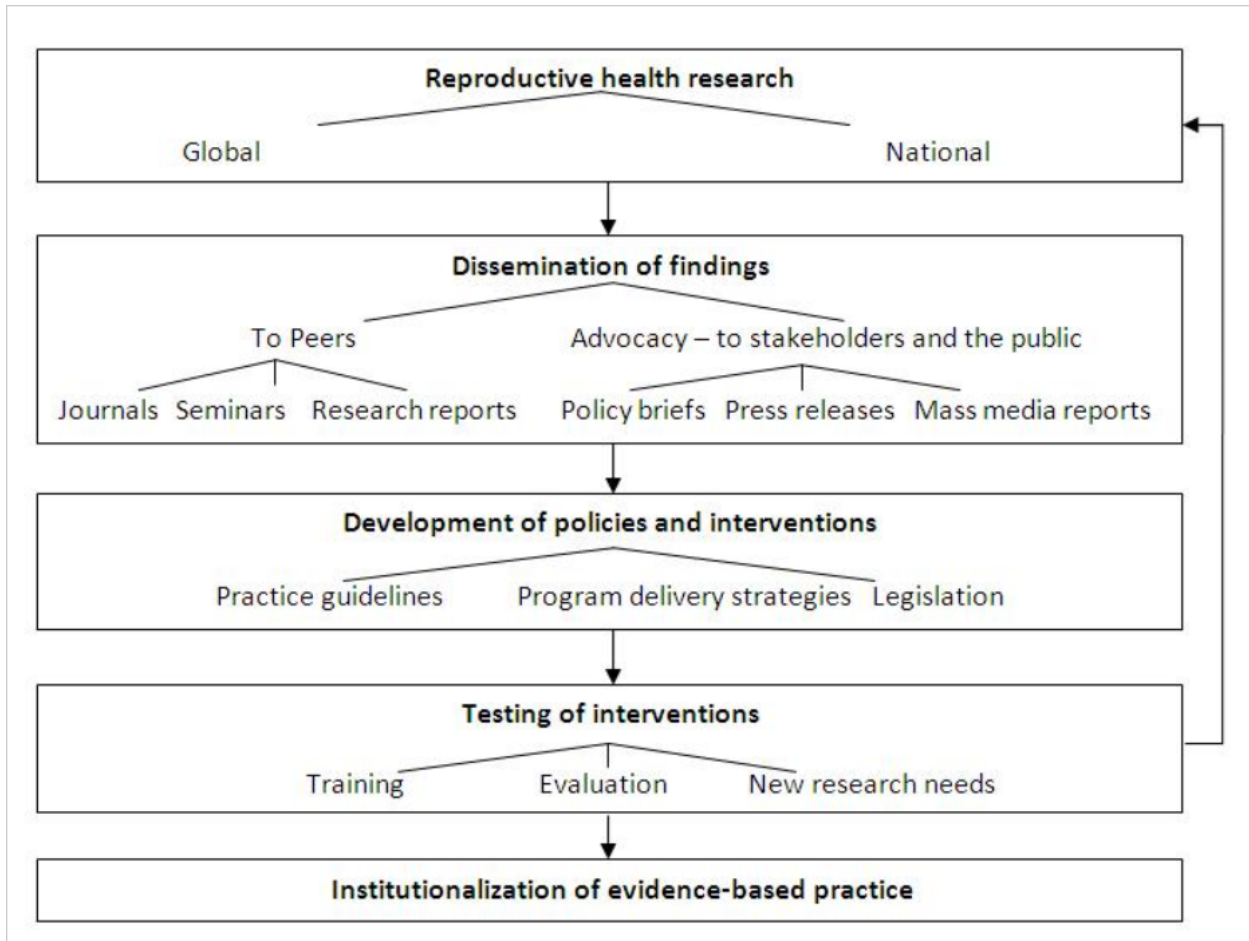
Evidence Application: What does *it* look like?

Since there are multiple ways that evidence can be applied in the real world, there are also multiple ways to indicate that use has in fact occurred. The information below offers a list of indicators. You may have others to add from your own experience.

Measuring evidence use is complex. Sometimes evidence is directly applicable (we see policy guidance developed around it). It can also be applied, but not so obvious (evidence seen in collaboration activities or funds leveraged). For example:

- New policies or amended policies
- Recommendations adopted by implementing (and other) institutions.
- Guidelines revised to reflect the evidence
- Influencing the upstream policy dialogue
- Inclusion on agenda of technical working groups or other key meetings
- Changes in level of funding
- Number of policies, programs, or products developed on basis of this study
- Frequency and quality of interactions with high level policy makers
- Incidence of similar projects
- Changes made to program or services
- Scaling of the original program within geographic area

The diagram below from the reproductive health field illustrates presents a simplified pathway from research to institutionalization of evidence-based practice. Following the pathway, starting with having national or global research findings, we can see the many points where evidence can be applied in policy-making.



Source: MEASURE Evaluation (2016). *Operations Research Framework*.

http://www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/prh/rh_indicators/crosscutting/operations-research/OperationsResearchFramework.JPG

Developing a Communication strategy

Having a clear strategy on how you will communicate your evidence to a targeted policymaker is critical in enabling uptake.

Developing a communications strategy involves various steps including:

1. Define your communication objectives
2. Identify and analyze your audiences and their contexts (including the potential opposition)
3. Decide on the messages to convey to your audiences
4. Select the channels to use (e.g. publications, media, social media, events, human contacts)
5. Create a communication work-plan
6. Implement your communications activities
7. Monitor and evaluate your communication objectives and activities



Source: <https://pixabay.com/en/dialog-tip-advice-hint-speaking-148815/>

Step 1: Define your communication objectives

What do you want to achieve with your communications activities? Define this in simple, clear and measurable terms. Your communication objective(s) will be informed by the issue you are seeking to address. For instance, if the issue you are seeking to address is not on the policy agenda, then your communication objectives will focus on setting the agenda for the issue, and this will largely involve increasing awareness and understanding of the issue and its implications for development. On the other hand, if the issue you are seeking to address is already on the agenda, then you will need to understand why the issue is not receiving the requisite attention. Your communication objective for such an issue will seek to shift thinking on the issue by clarifying misunderstandings or confusion surrounding the issue, or tackling the opposition to the issue.

Often, people confuse communication objectives and program objectives, especially if communications activities are part of a specific program. The table below illustrates examples of communication objectives versus program objectives. What is most important is to think critically about what can actually be achieved by communication activities. This process helps you refine your communication objectives only to what is can be achieved by your communications activities.

| Communications Objectives | Program objectives |
|--|---|
| Raise awareness among policymakers about the need for increased resources for maternity services | Increase the number of women who receive free maternity services by 30% in 2016 |
| Increase support for the revision of the current free maternity health services guidelines | Revise the current free maternity health services guidelines |
| Increase understanding among health policymakers about the need to prioritize community health workers | Increase funds allocated to the community health worker program in the country |
| Promote the increase of resource allocations to health research | Increase resource allocation to health research |

After defining your communications objectives, the next important thing to do is to define the specific outcome(s) for each communication objective. The outcome(s) will demonstrate success that a specific communication objective has been achieved. The table below provides some examples of communication objectives and their potential outcomes.

| Communications Objective | Expected Outcome |
|---|---|
| Help the Principal Secretary and Director of Medical Services better understand what works in reducing child deaths | Adoption of effective interventions for reducing child deaths |
| Increase understanding among health policymakers about the need to prioritize community health workers | Increased resource allocations to the community health worker program |

An important point to bear in mind is that policy change is an incremental process, and so your communications objectives will need to be informed by this reality. Being realistic on what you can actually achieve with your communications activities means that you do not set yourself up for failure.

Step 2: Identify and analyze your audiences

An important first step in analyzing your audience is categorizing them so that you are clear on:

- Who is your Primary Audience? – The policymaker who can directly affect policy on your issue
- Who is your Secondary Audience? – Policymakers and other actors who can influence the primary audience (allies)
- Who are your Opponents? – Policymakers and other actors opposed to your policy reform suggestions

The next step in analyzing your audiences is to find out:

- What do they know about your topic?
- Are they interested in your topic?
- Who do they listen to?
- What are their information needs about your topic?
- What are their current sources of information?
- What are the best ways to reach them? (formats & channels)

A good understanding of your audience will inform the next steps of your communication, i.e. developing compelling messages for each of the different audiences and choosing effective formats and channels for reaching these audiences.

Step 3: Developing Messages

Note that a lot of important elements in developing compelling messages were covered in the previous module on Synthesizing Evidence. It is important to recap four things here:

1. Keep the number of key messages for each group to a maximum of **2-3 messages**, and deliver those same messages consistently to that group.
2. Tailor the message to fit the audience - it's the audience that should drive message content. The policymaker is likely to be most interested in one aspect of what you have to present - **What's in it for me?**
3. Make sure the message is delivered by a source the audience finds credible - The **messenger is often as important or (sometimes) more important than the message** itself (i.e. 'the medium is the message' adage).
4. Keep the message at the level of the audience - **avoid technical jargon** - Using words or phrasing that conjure positive images - better to say 'family planning' or 'child spacing' than 'population control'.

Effective policy messages often incorporate phrases that are in vogue in the popular culture or that are framed in terms of people's values or conjure positive images in people's minds about an issue.

Source of your message: Who should deliver your message?

The person who delivers your message is as important as the message. Think critically about who should deliver your message?

- You
- Your boss

- A celebrity
- A policymaker who is already on “your side”
- A foreigner

Step 4: Select the Channels to Use

Communication channels may include:

1. Face-to-face (Interpersonal):
 - Workshops, seminars (are there upcoming ‘focus-generating events’)
2. Reports or policy memoranda, or letters, email
3. Mass media
 - Press
 - Broadcast (Radio & TV)
 - Mass mailings
 - Internet websites
4. Social media - Twitter, Facebook

Select formats that are the most appropriate for your audiences:

- Print materials: fact sheets, wall charts, booklets, policy memoranda
- Presentations: computer graphics, slides
- TV & radio spots, news releases
- Electronic channels (Internet)

Step 5: Create a Work Plan

Key questions to ask yourself when creating a work plan:

- For whom
- When
- By what means
- By whom
- How often
- How many

In your work plan, specify:

- Communication activities and the timelines
- What resources are needed (human & financial)
- Be alert to opportunities! Are there any upcoming ‘focus-generating events’ that will support your objective?

Remember to identify and include in your work plan **focus-generating events** such as:

- Global or national conferences
- Legislation for laws/regulations
- Annual budgeting process
- Periodic program reviews/evaluations

Pretest your messages! This can:

- Dramatically improve the effectiveness of materials

- Be low cost & require minimal effort

Step 6: Implement your Communications Activities

Nothing will be achieved unless if you implement your communications work plan!

Step 7: Monitor & Evaluate your Communication Activities

- Performance - Were all the activities implemented, delivered, & on time?
- Evidence that your issue has gained the attention of policymakers (are senior policymakers talking about your issue, or starting initiatives to tackle your issue, e.g. setting up a task-force or TWG to draft a policy on your issue)
- Impact - Did activities bring about the desired change? (is there a new policy or program tackling your issue?)
- Evidence that your interventions have enhanced coalition efforts to increase the saliency of your issue
- Evidence of use of your information for policy learning

In a word, effective communication strategies rely on:

- Audience-centered approach
- Ongoing communications/engagement activities
- Disseminating information at the right time, for the right length of time

If well designed, your communications activities will create demand for more information on the issue and/or trigger a change in policy or program.

Additional Resources and Useful Links

Global Health Learning Center. (2016). *Health Communication for Managers*:
<http://www.globalhealthlearning.org/course/health-communication-managers>

The 3-hour online tutorial addresses health communication with these objectives:

1. Appreciate the role of health communication in public health and development
2. Understand key steps in the development, implementation, and evaluation of high-quality health communication interventions
3. Access additional resources for health communication planning and guidance

O'Sullivan, G., Yonkler, J., Morgan, W., and Merritt, A. (2003). *A Field Guide to Designing a Health Communication Strategy*.

<http://ccp.jhu.edu/documents/A%20Field%20Guide%20to%20Designing%20Health%20Comm%20Strategy.pdf>

This extensive document provides practical guidance to those who are in a position to design, implement, or support a strategic health communication effort. The emphasis of the guide is on developing a comprehensive, long-term approach to health communication that responds appropriately to audience needs. The guide has three primary audiences: program managers in developing countries who are responsible for designing and implementing health programs, communication specialists who are responsible for designing and executing health communication strategies and for developing materials and messages, and policymakers and representatives of funding agencies who determine the level of support

for health communication strategies and the degree to which communication efforts are integrated into other health program initiatives.

Weyrauch, V. & Garzón, T. (2014). *An insight into the Webinar “Nevermind the research piece! Communicating in policy environments.”* <http://www.politicsandideas.org/?p=1597>

This discussion note provides an alternative starting point for bridging research to practice than building capacity in research communications. It proposed to go the heart of where policy is crafted; de-centre the research piece and instead focus on the context of policy and politics. Crucially, this can help us better reflect on what it means to communicate in such an environment, including our ongoing role and potential contribution.

Research and Policy in Development Program (2005). *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations.* <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/192.pdf>

This toolkit is for researchers and practitioners who wish to communicate to policymakers. The tools are therefore specifically geared towards the needs of researchers and practitioners in civil society organizations (CSOs), including development NGOs, research institutes, think tanks, universities and networks. The toolkit addresses the questions of how researchers and CSOs can best communicate evidence in order to inform or influence policy, to achieve their own stated development objectives, or simply to make their own knowledge accessible and understandable to a wider audience.

Mollett, A., Moran, D., and Dunleavy, P. (2011). *Using Twitter in university research, teaching and impact activities: A guide for academics and researchers.* http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/files/2011/11/Published-Twitter_Guide_Sept_2011.pdf

This guide shows you how to get started on Twitter and how Twitter can be used as a resource for research, teaching and impact activities.