

Helping Program Staff Connect and Communicate with Increasingly Diverse Constituents

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Workshop Goals and Outcomes

- **Goals:** To provide strategies and tools necessary for program staff to
 1. Identify target audiences and
 2. Connect with each audience in an effective way
- **Outcomes:** To learn how to
 1. Design and conduct focus groups;
 2. Interpret qualitative research findings;
 3. Understand the language, needs, fears and expectations of the target audience; and
 4. Formulate messages that are unambiguous, respectful and culturally sensitive

Workshop Agenda

- Essentials of conducting focus groups to identify target audience
- Making sense of audience research findings
- Preparing your written and verbal communications wisely
- Principles of strategic message development
- Focus group and message design exercise

It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear

- 42% of Americans say we are spending **too much** on **welfare** yet
- 51% are willing to pay higher taxes for “**further law enforcement**”
- 55% said the emergency room care should **not be given** to illegal aliens
- 68% of Americans think we are spending **too little** on **assistance to the poor**
- 68% would pay higher taxes to **halt the rising crime rate**
- 38% said the emergency room care should **be denied** to illegal aliens

Frank Luntz

Ten Rules of Successful Communication

- Simplicity
- Brevity
- Credibility
- Consistency
- Novelty
- Sound and texture
- Speak aspirationally
- Visualize
- Ask question
- Provide context and explain relevance

(Frank Luntz)

Know Your Audience

- Assume people have less knowledge than you would like to believe
- Respond to people's human concerns
- Consider who benefits and who gets hurt by what we are trying to do
- Understand how your audience receives information
- The "general public" is **NOT** a target audience

Who Is Our Target Audience?

- Our constituents may be defined in our organization's mission, our own job description, or in our grant requirements (e.g., individuals who live with Alzheimer's or another dementia; Black/African-American community)
- What do we know about this group? Not homogenous, sub-groups/various audiences
- What do we **not** know about this group and how do we go about finding out?

What Is a Focus Group?

1. People,
2. Who possess certain characteristics,
3. Provide qualitative data
4. In a focused discussion
5. To help understand the topic of interest

Krueger & Casey

Focus Group Purpose

- To understand how people feel or think about product, service, institution, or issue
- To advise decision making before, during or after an event or a program
- To diagnose potential problems with a product, service, institution, or issue
- To learn how people talk about the product, service, institution, or issue of interest (i.e., what words they use)

Participants

- Ideally, 5 to 10
- Less than 4 too few
- More than 12 too many
- **Homogeneity** of demographics, psychographics, etc.
- Group dynamics, social power/status

My Focus Group

1. A group of four
2. Black/African-American, well-educated, female care partners in their 50s and 60s
3. Provided insights and suggestions
4. In a focused discussion about our messages and media
5. To help understand how we can better communicate with families affected by Alzheimer's or another dementia in their community

Moderator

- Interested in hearing other people's thoughts and feelings
- Expressive of own feelings
- Animated and spontaneous
- Sense of humor
- Empathetic
- Admits own biases
- Insightful about people
- Expresses thoughts carefully

Focus Group Questions

- Opening and ground rules
- Introduction of the issue/product/service
- Transition
- Key questions:
 - 3-5 open-ended question routes
 - Short, clear, no jargon clarifying questions
- Probing questions
- Ending

Focus on Three Aspects of Communication

1. Message (a) content (what we say), (b) form (text, visuals, audio) and (c) delivery (how we say it)
2. Media (what channels we use to communicate vs. what media the target audience consumes)
3. What the audience hears and wants to hear from us

Focus Group Data Analysis

- Comparison: emerging categories and themes
- Contextualization of words that are central to the development of themes
- Society/community experiences emerge in the discourse
- Group interactions and dynamics

Message-Related Questions & Answers

- What words do they use to describe memory issues in their loved ones (Alzheimer's, dementia, brain disease, other)?
 - Denial
 - Stigma
 - Alzheimer's vs dementia
- What do they think the programs and services described in catalogs, flyers and post cards actually entail (caregiver assessment, care plan, care manager, geriatric assessment, care consultation)
 - Confusing terminology, jargon
 - Education
 - Financial reasons and routines prevent caregivers from attending/being involved

Comments about the Form and Delivery

- What spokespeople do they expect to deliver messages?
 - See people of color in the organization's staff, volunteers, and among presenters and moderators
 - See people of color on posters and in PSAs
 - Counterintuitively, see familiar/local/recognizable faces and names on posters and in PSAs
- Who are opinion leaders and influencers?
 - We are not just in churches
 - Outreach to professional Black organizations

Comments about the Media

- Print media are scarce
- Radio stations including the NPR affiliates
- Social media
- Videos featuring community members in social media
- Theater
- Book clubs and audio recordings of books
- Lunch-and-learns and webinars for professionals

What They Hear and What Matters

- How do they think of themselves (caregiver, care partner, loved one, other)?
 - Protect dignity of all involved – those with dementia and their loved ones
 - Diverse community
- What do they care about? What things matter to them?
 - Timing of events and activities
 - Location of activities and services
 - Subjects that affect directly—show how Alzheimer's affects all generations
 - Often, presentations are too long and repetitive (the same info all the time)
 - Interactive, no lecturing

Pros and Cons of Focus Groups

- Limitations: Reflective of the people in the session, not the entire population
- A well-run focus group is the **most honest** of all research techniques because it involves the **most candid** commentary and all of the **uncensored** intensity that real people can muster (F. Luntz)
- Participants are made to feel comfortably talking about what they truly feel and think

Communication Goals: Rational and Emotional Appeals

- Inform--increase audiences' awareness of an issue
- Educate—explain how it hurts/benefits the audience
- Persuade--make your audiences feel and believe as you do about the issue in question
- Motivate--encourage your target audiences to take a specific action vis-à-vis this issue

Principles of Persuasion

- **Identification**: Audience must identify with your idea and see how it affects their lives
- **Action**: Provide a means of action that you are about to take or the audience could conveniently take to prove the merit of your idea
- **Familiarity and Trust**: People buy into the ideas sponsored by those they trust and perceive as credible
- **Clear**: Your idea must be unambiguous as people tend to see things as black or white

What Is a Message?

- Brief, clear statements of purpose, intention and benefit delivered to identified audiences
- What you stand for or what you offer
- How it will benefit specific people
- What you want these people to do

Content Tips

- Avoid
 - Professional jargon (e.g., geriatric assessment)
 - Ambiguous language (e.g., care manager/care coordinator; care partner/caregiver)
 - Unintentional patronizing (e.g., support group)
 - Culturally insensitive (e.g., caregiver)
- Develop audience-friendly terminology (e.g., ?)

PLAIN

- [The Plain Language Action and Information Network \(PLAIN\)](#) is a group of federal employees from different agencies who support the use of clear communication in government writing
- The goal is to promote the use of plain language for all government communications
- It is believed that using plain language will save federal agencies time and money and provide better service to the American public

NIH Clear Communication

- Provides information in the form and with the content that is accessible to specific audiences based on cultural respect
- Incorporates plain language approaches and new technologies
- Plain language is grammatically correct language that includes complete sentence structure and accurate word usage
- Plain language is *not* unprofessional writing or a method of "dumbing down" or "talking down" to the reader
- Getting started or brushing up
- Connecting with your readers

Cultural Respect

- National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards
- [CLAS Standards, Fact Sheet, ThinkCulturalHealth.hhs.gov](#)
- [National Center for Cultural Competency, Georgetown University](#)
- [Self-assessment tools](#)

Usability

- [Usability.gov](https://www.usability.gov) is the leading resource for user experience (UX) best practices and guidelines, serving practitioners and students in the government and private sectors
- The site provides overviews of the [user-centered design process](#) and various [UX disciplines](#). It also covers the related information on [methodology and tools](#) for making digital content more usable and useful
- Content for this site is managed by the [Digital Communications Division](#) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs
- HHS actively collaborates with many federal agencies and other individuals in the public and private sector interested in UX to produce content and share industry trends and ideas

Message Communication

- How do you get the target audiences to
 - See,
 - Hear, and
 - Read
- What is the best means to reach them

Exercise

- Design a focus group
- Conduct a focus group
- Develop audience-friendly terminology

Suggested Jargon to Focus on

- Enrichment activity
- Social activity
- Caregiver assessment
- Care consultation
- Family consultation
- Care plan, care manager
- Specialty support groups
- Community education

Question Routes

- Workshop participants to brainstorm

Proposed Alternatives

- As a result of mini focus groups, workshop participants propose alternative to the jargon/hard-to-understand terminology

References

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