

# Public Health Bulletin Communications Plan Template

## Introduction

There are many reasons why a public health bulletin (PHB) requires a communications plan, some of which are listed below.

1. to increase readership
2. to increase the number of manuscripts submitted that meet the criteria of the PHB
3. to disseminate information rapidly
4. to secure financial and political support
5. to get indexed

A communications plan is part of or an addendum to a comprehensive strategic plan, which establishes the mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the PHB. Both documents are based on a situational analysis that identifies the need for a PHB, other complementary products, stakeholders, and resources.

This document presents a step-by-step process to develop a PHB communications plan so that valuable resources are efficiently utilized to achieve PHB goals.

## Step 1: Identify the PHB's Stakeholders

A stakeholder is anyone who has an interest in the PHB and whom you want to have an interest in the PHB. For example, some stakeholders (e.g., authors, readers, media channels) may not be aware that they are, indeed, stakeholders, and so a communications plan should focus on educating these groups. Potential stakeholders include:

- Staff within your department
- Heads of MOH departments
- District and regional level health management teams
- Deans and professors of schools of public health and medicine
- Researchers
- Donors
- Professional societies
- Other PHBs or journals
- NGOs working in health and development, including WHO
- Media
- Members of parliament
- Readers /general public
- Authors
- Project funders (CDC, Bloomberg)

## Step 2: Assess the Level of Influence the Stakeholder has on the PHB

Factors to consider when determining whether the stakeholder has high, medium, or low influence are:

1. Do they have control over financial resources?
2. Can they influence support for the PHB? Even non-supporters are important.
3. What contributions do they make to the PHB?
4. Which stakeholders are most affected by the PHB?

Once the stakeholders are ranked according to level of influence, decisions can be made regarding allocation of resources. Some resources should be directed toward those stakeholders that have limited influence or are least affected by the PHB because they do have the potential to put up roadblocks if they are not kept informed (e.g., the person who neglects to put your presentation on the agenda of an important meeting).

### Step 3: List the Key Interests of the Stakeholders

Different stakeholders (see list provided for Step 1) will have different expectations of the PHB and its team. It is important to understand what those expectations are, and, at the very least, a communications plan should include regular meetings with these stakeholders to address their interests.

### Step 4: Develop Products / Talking Points

Different talking points and products are developed to accommodate the interests of each important stakeholder. The primary product is, of course, the PHB. Potential authors, one of the primary stakeholders, may be concerned that the PHB is not, yet, as prestigious as *The Lancet*. An appropriate strategy for a new PHB is to build a good reputation by providing quality services to the authors. Examples of services and products from WHO's "Manual for Editors of Health Science Journals"<sup>1</sup> include:

1. working with authors, especially inexperienced authors, to produce good manuscripts (e.g., writing workshops),
2. providing clear, concise author guidelines,
3. defining and maintaining high publication standards,
4. developing an effective online submission process, and
5. defining and maintaining high standards of effective editorial processes.

Appropriate talking points to authors include:

1. It takes less time to produce and publish a manuscript in the PHB.
2. The audience is more targeted and appropriate, which increases the chance of action to improve health status and save lives. For example, the article is more likely to be read by a member of parliament or a minister of health, who can influence policy.
3. Abstracts of published articles can be reproduced in the PHB with the copyright holder's permission.

Additional talking points can list the services provided.

### Step 5: Identify Communication Channels for Dissemination

As mentioned in the previous section, the primary product to disseminate is the PHB. It is not practical to expect people to find the PHB on their own or to periodically check the website. Social media like Facebook and Twitter help, but they are not enough.

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<sup>1</sup> WHO (2009). Manual for Editors of Health Science Journals. World Health Organization – Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo (accessed on March 15, 2018 <http://applications.emro.who.int/dsaf/dsa1034.pdf>).

Having a strategy to disseminate the PHB is a must. Dissemination lists must be created, maintained, and protected. A dissemination list is created using the list of stakeholders developed in Step 1. Email alerts must be sent out every time an issue is published using the dissemination list. According to the “Manual for Editors of Health Science Journals,” other channels for dissemination include:

1. making good use of the editorial board to act as journal representatives and attract contributions,
2. providing the editorial board with a supply of leaflets to hand out at meetings,
3. attending conferences and meetings,
4. asking members of the editorial board to include their position on the editorial board as part of their e-mail “signature,”
5. e-mailing target groups with information about the latest issue and including an electronic copy,
6. maintaining a dedicated webpage,
7. hosting a launching event, and
8. establishing links to other relevant websites

If the target group has a high level of influence, it always helps to send a personal note with a copy of the PHB. For high-level decision-makers, hand deliver a print copy of the PHB.

Don’t forget the channels controlled by the media (and bloggers). The media is a stakeholder with high influence that controls important dissemination channels. Regular media briefings and press kits are key dissemination strategies that should go in every communications plan.<sup>2</sup> Other dissemination channels include workshops and one-on-one meetings.

## Step 6: Determine Frequency

To get the attention of key stakeholders, interact with them on multiple occasions. Determine the frequency of interactions that is appropriate for each stakeholder to facilitate planning and ensure resources are available. For example, it may be necessary to meet with the Editorial Board quarterly, the Minister of Health monthly, and the media when there is an event of public health importance.

## Step 7: Identify Resources

Identify resources to implement the communications plan. For example, for meetings and workshops, resources are needed to secure a venue and provide refreshments if the meeting is longer than half a day. Start-up costs for all PHBs include investments in developing a website, producing a distribution list (See Step 5), and training mentors for authors.

## Step 8: Establish Monitoring Indicators

The monitoring indicators should answer the following questions:

- Have we achieved our objectives?
- How successful were we in reaching our targeted audiences?
- Were the dissemination channels effective?

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<sup>2</sup> LevelTen (2007). The seven elements of a press release: everything you need to know. <https://getlevelten.com/blog/taylor-c/seven-elements-press-release-everything-you-need-know>. Accessed 18 June 2018.

- Were there any policy changes as a result of information in the PHB?
- How many articles were referenced by the media or bloggers?

## Putting it All Together

Use Table E.1 to create your communications plan. Each column in the table represents a step outlined in this document.

Table E.1. Sample PHB Communications Plan

Step 1 – Identify Stakeholder and Describe Role	Step 2 – Determine Level of Stakeholder Influence	Step 3 – List Key Interests and Issues	Step 4 – Develop Talking Points / Products	Step 5 – Identify Communication Channels for Dissemination	Step 6 – Determine Frequency	Step 7 – Identify Resources	Step 8 – Establish Monitoring Indicators
Media – can help to disseminate key messages of PHB issues	High	Want newsworthy articles to publish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press kits</li> <li>• Media workshop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-mail</li> <li>• Briefings</li> </ul>	As needed – when matters of public health importance arise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue and facilitator for workshop</li> <li>• Contacts of media channels</li> <li>• Time to meet face-to-face to promote the PHB</li> </ul>	Number of PHB articles referenced by the media
Minister of Health – Champion of PHB	High	PHB is his/her primary form of communication to the public	The PHB provides health professionals and the public an authoritative, timely, and influential source of information and recommendations for actions to minimize public health threats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face-to-face meetings</li> <li>• E-mail updates of PHB accomplishments</li> <li>• Print copies of the PHB</li> </ul>	As needed	Minimal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PHB is included in MOH strategic plan</li> <li>• PHB has a line item in the MOH budget</li> </ul>
Policy makers (members of parliament, ministers, permanent secretaries) – Target audience and can help ensure sustainability of PHB	High	Want reader-friendly, practical information that they can instantly use.	The PHB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print copies of PHB</li> <li>• Invitation to launching and other key events</li> </ul>	As needed	Contact list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PHB is included in MOH strategic plan</li> <li>• PHB has a line item in the MOH budget</li> </ul>