GETTING THE WORD OUT

Seven Tips for State Education Agencies to Improve Dissemination

Effective dissemination begins during product planning, not when a product is finished. Taking time to think through the audience, messages, channels, timeline, and measures of success before launch helps ensure the right information reaches the right people in ways they can use.

The educators, families, or students you want to reach should shape what you create from the start. Keeping your audience in mind throughout the planning process will make your products more usable, relevant, and effective, and thinking about dissemination early will help ensure your efforts translate into real impact on learning.

State education agency program leads and others responsible for product creation can use these seven steps to guide dissemination planning.

1 Define success

Establish a clear purpose for your effort.

"What do I want people to do, know, or feel?"

- What do you want to achieve, and why?
- What is the learning or behavior change you want to see?
- What specific outcomes should your dissemination effort influence?
- Who needs to do what differently for those outcomes to happen?
- Why would they be motivated to act?

2 Know your audience

Identify your primary audience, then consider secondary audiences.

"Who do I want to talk to?"

- Who needs this information most?
- Who influences them or can connect you with them?
- Where and how do they prefer to receive this type of information?
- What barriers might prevent them from acting?

3 Learn from previous efforts

Review past dissemination activities and outcomes to identify what successfully reached your intended audience and where efforts fell short.

"What do we know works?"

- What are the patterns, barriers, best practices, and lessons learned from past dissemination efforts?
- What helps or hinders your audience from accessing, trusting, and using information? What insights can you learn from experienced communicators and from your audience directly?

4 Develop your messages

Draft key messages in clear, simple language so your audience can quickly understand what matters most.

"What do I want my audience to know or do?"

- What is the most important thing for your audience to know or do? Keep your message focused and easy to remember.
- Draft a few key messages in plain language that answer:
  - Why does this matter?
  - Why now?
  - What is the main call-to-action or primary learning objective?

5 Choose the right channels

Choose the platforms or channels that work best for your audience.

"Where does my audience hang out?"

- Which channels does your audience already use and trust?
- Which mix of broad and targeted channels will give you the best reach?
- When and how often should you share information for maximum attention?

6 Build the timeline

Time your outreach around when your audience is most likely to pay attention. Avoid busy periods or holidays. If they need to act by a certain deadline, make sure you give them enough time to do so.

"What do I need them to do, by when?"

- When is your audience most available? What periods should you avoid?
- How much time do they need to act on the information?
- What deadlines or milestones should guide your timing?

7 Measure and adjust

Choose a few simple ways to measure success and determine how well you reach your audience.

"Did it work?"

- Which indicators will show whether your messages are reaching the right people?
- Are your efforts creating the awareness or actions you intended?
- What should you adjust if certain messages or channels are not working?

Be strategic and start dissemination planning early. Use these seven steps as a planning checklist before launching any new initiative, product, or communication effort.

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