

# AHRQ Publishing and Communications Guidelines

## Section 3: Media and Marketing/Dissemination Outreach



Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality  
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# Section 3: Media and Marketing/Dissemination Outreach

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## Promoting Agency Research, Tools, and Resources

AHRQ's Office of Communications and Knowledge Transfer (OCKT) works to promote the research, tools, and resources developed and funded by the Agency. We also help grantees and contractors promote the findings of their AHRQ-funded research through many well-established AHRQ dissemination channels, all of which are discussed below. OCKT works with AHRQ program staff, grantees, and contractors to maintain the AHRQ brand, to promote findings to the media and to disseminate and implement knowledge based on the research to appropriate audiences in the health care community.

### Overview and Key Contacts

This section provides an overview of the activities OCKT uses to promote the Agency and its mission. The tactics OCKT uses are designed to promote the Agency's strategic goals to the public and to AHRQ stakeholders, including clinicians, policymakers, health systems, and State and local governments. We use a wide range of targeted techniques to reach the appropriate audience.

Social marketing research clearly indicates messages need to be delivered multiple times using different vehicles for audiences to focus on and understand them. For example, commercial product campaigns usually involve print and broadcast advertising as well as product placement and other techniques.

Another key to effective dissemination and awareness building is sustainability. It is not sufficient to promote a message or product one time and assume it has struck a chord with an audience. OCKT takes every opportunity and venue to promote messages and products to the appropriate audience, and we try to integrate messages so they build on each other and are used over time.

Our most basic message is the Agency's mission: To produce evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable, and work within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and with other partners to make sure the evidence is understood and used. OCKT reinforces the mission in every tactic and activity we pursue, and we work with the Agency's offices and centers and their respective contractors to ensure that the Agency and our mission are reflected appropriately in the materials, articles, and products that are developed with AHRQ dollars.

OCKT also works to promote the Agency as a resource for reporters, the public, and health care decisionmakers. To that end, we promote the expertise of AHRQ staff and the knowledge and evidence we develop. Our goal is to create "repeat customers" who seek us out for their health care information needs in addition to introducing AHRQ to new audiences.

To help streamline our work, OCKT works closely with the Agency’s various research areas to deliver high-quality marketing and dissemination strategies. For marketing and media-related questions contractors and grantees should contact OCKT representatives (and should courtesy copy their project officer or task order officer as well):

- Patient Safety: Farah Englert (farah.englert@ahrq.hhs.gov) or Margie Shofer (margie.shofer@ahrq.hhs.gov).
- AHRQ General Marketing/Dissemination: Kristie Kiser (kristie.kiser@ahrq.hhs.gov).
- Data Resources (AHRQ’s Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP) and Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)): Bruce Seeman (bruce.seeman@ahrq.hhs.gov) or Lorin Smith (lorin.smith@ahrq.hhs.gov).
- Center for Evidence and Practice Improvement (AHRQ’s Evidence Based Practice Centers, Health Information Technology, and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force): Rachel Weinstein (rachel.weinstein@ahrq.hhs.gov).
- Media Relations and HHS Press Office Liaison: Alison Hunt (alison.hunt@ahrq.hhs.gov).

## Media and Marketing/Dissemination Strategies

OCKT’s media and dissemination strategies include media outreach and response; dissemination and implementation; audio/video production and clearance; stakeholder outreach and social media. These categories are not exclusive, but they do provide a good structure for connecting the dots among all the activities OCKT pursues to promote AHRQ’s mission and messages. They are intended to overlap so AHRQ reaches audiences with multiple vehicles.

AHRQ grantees and contractors should coordinate all media/dissemination outreach—including but not limited to, press releases, public-facing Web sites, slide presentations, traditional and social media outreach, videos, marketing fliers and other materials—through OCKT.

### Media Outreach and Response

OCKT invests a great deal of time and effort on media outreach and response. Media refers to reporters who write about AHRQ research for print and online general, daily and weekly newspapers, television and radio programs, trade associations, legislative publications, blogs, podcasts, educational press, and other types of articles. The media are an important audience and a critical conduit to the public, policymakers, and health professionals. As part of this effort, we work to build relationships with reporters so they rely on AHRQ as an important resource for information.

## **Press Releases**

OCKT assesses the newsworthiness of AHRQ-funded research and tools by asking several basic questions:

- Is the finding being published in a top-tier journal such as the New England Journal of Medicine or the Journal of the American Medical Association?
- Is the finding actionable and of wide interest to a broad group of stakeholders, including clinicians, policymakers, payers and possibly patients?
- Does the finding or tool have the ability to change the way health care is practiced or have significant impact in the field?

For those findings and tools that meet these criteria, OCKT staff members draft a press release and work with AHRQ subject matter experts and HHS press office colleagues to navigate the clearance process. OCKT sends press releases to reporters via a major national newswire service that reaches print and broadcast media and through a media listserv to reporters who have requested to receive news bulletins from AHRQ. Press releases from AHRQ and other HHS agencies require clearance from the HHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA). Press releases developed by AHRQ grantees and contractors must also be approved as part of an HHS “third party” release clearance process. Appendix 3-A has the steps in the AHRQ and third-party press release clearance process.

Third-party press releases that mention AHRQ or AHRQ products need to be approved by OCKT and program staff prior to being distributed to the media. Press releases that include quotes from Federal officials need further clearance from ASPA.

Email all third-party press releases to Alison Hunt in OCKT at [alison.hunt@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:alison.hunt@ahrq.hhs.gov) for approval and HHS clearance, if necessary.

## **Media Interviews**

OCKT arranges interviews for AHRQ subject matter experts in response to reporter requests. OCKT also may contact reporters proactively to arrange interviews in publications appropriate to a specific message. In preparation for media interviews, OCKT obtains deadline information and, if possible, questions from reporters and provides background information, talking points, and sample questions and answers for Agency experts to use in media interviews.

Interview requests from major media outlets, such as ABC News or the New York Times, require clearance from ASPA. Appendix 3-B has details on the media interview clearance process.

Per HHS Media Policy ([www.hhs.gov/news/media\\_policy.html](http://www.hhs.gov/news/media_policy.html)), only an HHS employee can speak to the media on behalf of his/her agency. Contractors, fellows (except Title 42 fellows), and other non-Federal employees employed by HHS cannot speak on behalf of the Agency. In instances where there are technical questions that require data or input

from contractors, OCKT will help coordinate how the information is provided to the reporter. Review the HHS Guidelines on the Provision of Information to the News Media for additional information at [www.hhs.gov/news/media\\_policy.html](http://www.hhs.gov/news/media_policy.html).

OCKT submits a nightly media report to ASPA by 4 p.m. ET Monday through Friday. The report includes a list of media requests that were fielded that day, including the name of the reporter, the media outlet, and the nature of the inquiry. Information for this report must be submitted to Alison Hunt by 3 p.m. ET to be included in that evening's report. If you received a media request and were cleared by OCKT to conduct the interview, send an email to [alison.hunt@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:alison.hunt@ahrq.hhs.gov) with information about the request and how it was handled.

Here is an example of an item for the ASPA nightly report:

Jane Smith of Health Care Executive Magazine contacted AHRQ for information on the average out-of-pocket cost of health insurance for employees. We arranged for her to speak with AHRQ expert Steve Cohen, Ph.D.

## **Marketing/Dissemination Outreach**

OCKT uses a variety of marketing/dissemination tactics to convey messages to the public, policymakers, and professional audiences. Unlike the tactics in the media category, these tactics go directly to the audiences and not through a media intermediary. OCKT develops marketing/dissemination plans that encompass different levels of effort and outreach to a range of audiences. OCKT works with partners and stakeholders to maximize outreach and potential.

## **Marketing/Dissemination Plans**

OCKT develops customized marketing plans to convey key messages about significant AHRQ research and tools to specific targeted audiences. Marketing/dissemination plans use a variety of OCKT communications tools, including newsletters, listservs, and social media, to reach target audiences. In addition, OCKT provides direct outreach to communications directors at identified stakeholders groups (e.g., the American Academy of Family Physicians and the National Association for Healthcare Quality) through tactics such as sample newsletter articles or tweets for them to use in to their own publications.

In consultation with program staff, OCKT staff use the following criteria to determine the level of resources that will be devoted to various outreach tactics. These criteria provide general guidance; research findings, reports and tools are considered on a case-by-case basis and evaluated individually. Marketing/dissemination efforts can be tailored accordingly.

In general, findings or tools that have widespread applicability to the health care field because they have the potential to change medical practice/behaviors or those that have the potential to affect change in areas with a high public health burden receive the highest level of dissemination:

## Gold-Level Outreach/Dissemination

- Is the finding being published in a top-tier journal such as the New England Journal of Medicine or the Journal of the American Medical Association? If so, a press release is typically drafted and cleared with AHRQ and HHS.
- Is the finding actionable and of wide interest to a broad group of stakeholders, including clinicians, policymakers, payers and possibly patients?
- Does the finding or tool have the ability to change the way health care is practiced or have significant impact in the field? **Example:** In September 2014, AHRQ and the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute announced the launch of a registry for patients with uterine fibroids.

Once a finding or tool is determined to be of gold-level interest, OCKT uses the following tactics to promote it:

- Draft, clear, and issue press release
- Issue listserv announcements via various AHRQ lists
- Include in AHRQ's weekly Electronic Newsletter
- Conduct marketing outreach, including development and distribution of sample newsletter articles and social media messages, to stakeholder groups representing target audiences
- Conduct social media outreach via AHRQ's Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts

## Silver-Level Outreach/Dissemination

- Is the research or tool published in a second-tier journal such as American Family Physician or The Green Journal?
- Is the research actionable but of interest to a narrower, targeted list of stakeholder groups?
- Is the research or tool important to the field, even though it doesn't necessarily have a broader message applicable to a wide audience? **Example: AHRQ's Health IT Workflow Toolkit.** The assessment and redesign of workflow analysis is critical before, during, and after any health IT system implementation to ensure maximum staff productivity and quality patient care. A new toolkit funded by AHRQ specifically addresses challenges and processes related to workflow analysis and redesign in the small-to-medium sized physician practice.

Once a finding or tool is determined to be of silver-level interest, OCKT uses the following tactics to promote it:

- Issue listserv announcements via various AHRQ lists
- Include in AHRQ’s weekly Electronic Newsletter
- Conduct marketing outreach, including development and distribution of sample newsletter articles and social media messages, to stakeholder groups representing target audiences including other HHS agencies such as the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, and the Health Resources and Services Administration.
- Conduct social media outreach via AHRQ’s Facebook and Twitter accounts

### **Bronze-Level Outreach/Dissemination**

- Is the research or tool not published in a journal but there is value in educating audiences about it? **Example: AHRQ’s “Improving the Emergency Department Discharge Process: Environmental Scan Report.”** OCKT promoted the availability of the environmental scan around the emergency department discharge process so that target audiences could gain greater awareness and insights into the ED discharge process and use the findings to improve their own processes.
- Is more research needed? Awareness raising is conducted as a “for the record approach” since the Agency has spent tax dollars to fund the research.

Once a finding or tool is determined to be of bronze-level interest, OCKT uses the following tactics to promote it:

- Issue listserv announcements via various AHRQ lists
- Include in AHRQ’s weekly Electronic Newsletter
- Conduct social media outreach via AHRQ’s Facebook and Twitter accounts

### **Electronic Newsletter**

OCKT writes, edits, and distributes the weekly AHRQ Electronic Newsletter, which features news about important Agency activities and AHRQ-funded journal articles to more than 100,000 subscribers. A typical e-newsletter article includes five to six sentences about the research or tool along with a link to the relevant section of the AHRQ Web site or a PubMed abstract for readers who want more details. The newsletter, designed to provide a quick snapshot of AHRQ news, is managed by Jeff Hardy in OCKT (jeff.hardy@ahrq.hhs.gov).

### **Listservs**

The Agency uses GovDelivery listservs and currently has several dozen topic-specific listservs for subscribers interested in the various research areas of the Agency. Similar to

short e-newsletter articles, the listserv postings typically include five to six sentences about the research or tool along with a link to the relevant section of the AHRQ Web site where the original source material can be found.

## **Journal Article Tracking**

OCKT tracks the publication of all AHRQ-funded research and assesses it for outreach potential, which can range from a press release to a mention in the Agency's Electronic Newsletter.

As soon as AHRQ-funded research findings have been **accepted** for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, **please alert OCKT by sending the accepted manuscript (drafts are acceptable) and the following information** to [journalpublishing@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:journalpublishing@ahrq.hhs.gov).

1. Title of study
2. Author names
3. Editor's tracking code (if available)
4. AHRQ grant or contract number
5. Type of article (research study, commentary, letter to the editor, etc.)
6. Name of journal
7. Journal contact (editor's contact name, email, and phone number)
8. Online publication date, with embargo time if applicable
9. Estimated print publication date, with embargo time if applicable
10. AHRQ Program contact (task order or grant officer)

**Note:** AHRQ *always* honors embargo dates and coordinates with journals as needed.

To ensure enough time for outreach efforts, please notify OCKT as soon as you know your (or your grantee's or contractor's) article has been accepted.

## **Audio/Video Production and Clearance**

OCKT produces audio and video to augment outreach to various audiences. The office also encourages professional and advocacy organizations to post AHRQ audio and video on their Web sites when the topic is of particular relevance.

## **Online Videos**

OCKT creates and disseminates online videos and audio-enabled slide presentations. The office currently has several YouTube channels for various audiences where AHRQ videos can be viewed and shared. On occasion, OCKT has created longer format patient

videos based on one or more AHRQ products. Videos are made available on YouTube. OCKT works with outside groups to help disseminate videos, along with the original AHRQ material. Examples of this are “Staying Active and Healthy: Blood Thinners” (<http://healthcare411.ahrq.gov/videocast.aspx?id=555>) and Aprende a vivir (<http://healthcare411.ahrq.gov/videonovela.aspx>) (a Spanish-language telenovela series that educates patients about comparing treatment options for managing diabetes). All videos produced by grantees and contractors should be delivered in 508 compliant format.

See Section 5, Audio and Video, for additional guidance on creating video, budgeting, timelines, and format.

Per HHS guidelines, all videos on YouTube must also be posted on a Federal government Web site. Contractors and grantees who plan to develop videos should review the YouTube Video Guidance (See Section 4, Social Media) before beginning the project. Email questions to OCKT’s social media team at [socialmedia@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:socialmedia@ahrq.hhs.gov).

## **Social Media**

As OCKT continues to expand the Agency’s social media presence, the goal is to ensure that social media outreach efforts by AHRQ staff and contractors are well coordinated and the Agency maintains the highest standards for its brand and messages.

Individuals who wish to use social media technologies as part of official AHRQ communications must follow standards and policies that govern information and information technology. Section 4, Social Media, has information on standards and policies that apply to the use of social media.

AHRQ staff and contractors should work with an OCKT representative to complete the AHRQ Social Media Checklist (Appendix 4-A) for any social media outreach. For general questions on social media, email [socialmedia@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:socialmedia@ahrq.hhs.gov).

## **Webinars**

OCKT can help facilitate webinars using WebEx, a Web-based media environment and network that allows users to:

- Conduct virtual meetings with remote attendees and integrated audio conferencing for up to 500 participants
- Provide online training (webinars and technical assistance sessions) for targeted user groups
- Handle real-time electronic collaborations with internal and external workgroups

For details, please visit the AHRQ WebEx meeting site at <https://hhs-ahrq.webex.com> or email Scott Rowe in OCKT ([scott.rowe@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:scott.rowe@ahrq.hhs.gov)).

## Partnerships

Working with key stakeholder groups is a way to enhance the credibility and reach of AHRQ's research and messages. Partnerships can also be a cost-effective way to reach outside organizations through enhanced "buy-in" of AHRQ-sponsored evidence.

OCKT considers the following factors when deciding to pursue partnerships with other organizations:

- Will the partnership help best reach the intended audiences?
- Which groups have the greatest influence and credibility with the intended audiences?
- Which organizations will be easiest to persuade to engage in a partnership and require the least amount of ongoing support?

Policies for working with for-profit partners include the following:

- AHRQ does not consider collaboration with corporations that endorse a specific commercial product, service, or enterprise.
- The AHRQ name and logo may be used only in conjunction with approved projects and only with the written permission of AHRQ. AHRQ retains the right to review all copy prior to approval of the use of the AHRQ name and logo.
- OCKT formally reviews each partnership proposal.
- No company will have an exclusive right to use the AHRQ name and logo, messages, or materials.
- AHRQ will not partner with companies that have any products, services, or promotional messages that conflict with AHRQ policies or programs; those that are currently in negotiation for a grant or contract with AHRQ; those that have any unresolved conflicts or disputes with AHRQ; or those for which establishing a partnership would create tension or conflict with another AHRQ partner or Federal program.

Questions about potential partnership agreements should be directed to Kristie Kiser in OCKT ([kristie.kiser@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:kristie.kiser@ahrq.hhs.gov)).

## Impact Case Studies

OCKT is always looking for ways in which AHRQ-funded research, products, and tools have changed people's lives, influenced clinical practice, improved policies, and affected patient outcomes. AHRQ Impact Case Studies describe AHRQ research findings in

action and are used in testimony, budget documents, and speeches. Grantees or contractors whose AHRQ-funded research has had an impact on health care policy, clinical practice, or patient outcomes should email [impactcasestudies@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:impactcasestudies@ahrq.hhs.gov). AHRQ's collection of case studies is available at [www.ahrq.gov/policymakers/case-studies/index.html](http://www.ahrq.gov/policymakers/case-studies/index.html).

## Additional Information

To discuss specific issues or obtain additional guidance on media and marketing outreach, contact:

Alison Hunt  
Media Relations and HHS Press Office Liaison  
Office of Communications and Knowledge Transfer  
Email: [alison.hunt@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:alison.hunt@ahrq.hhs.gov)  
Phone: 301-427-1244

Kristie Kiser  
AHRQ General Marketing/Dissemination  
Office of Communications and Knowledge Transfer  
Email: [kristie.kiser@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:kristie.kiser@ahrq.hhs.gov)  
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