

Quick-Start Guide to Dissemination for Practice-Based Research Networks

Overview

This document briefly describes the dissemination planning and implementation process. It contains links to resources that guide you through the phases of dissemination.

Introduction

Dissemination refers to the process of sharing research findings with stakeholders and wider audiences. Dissemination is essential for uptake, and uptake and use of research findings is crucial for the success and sustainability of practice-based research networks (PBRNs) in the long term.

Dissemination Planning

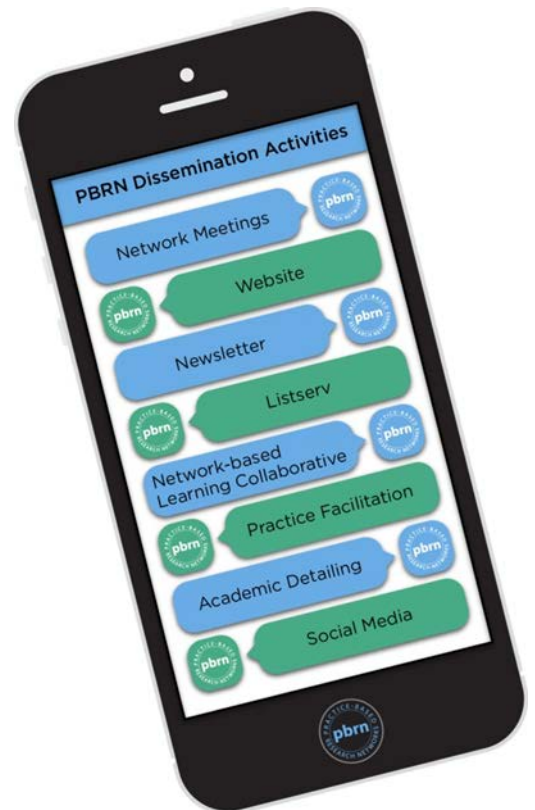
To ensure that the project results will be used, research projects must develop a dissemination plan that explains how the outcomes of the project will be shared with stakeholders, relevant institutions, organizations, and individuals. Specifically, a dissemination plan explains:

- Why—the purpose of dissemination
- What—the message to be disseminated
- To whom—the audience
- How—the method
- When—the timing

Ideally, the dissemination plan will link with a broader dissemination strategy for the overall program that encompasses the research project. It should be planned in consultation with the project partners and approved by the project management committee.

Stakeholder Analysis

The dissemination strategy should be based on an understanding of stakeholders and their information needs and preferences. A stakeholder is anyone who has a vested interest in the project or will be affected by its outcomes. Stakeholder analysis is an exercise in which stakeholders are identified, listed, and assessed in terms of their interest in the project and importance for its success and further dissemination. Key stakeholders for practice-based research networks include other PBRNs, primary care physicians and providers, the primary care research community, policymakers, and patients.



Key Elements of a Dissemination Plan

A dissemination plan must address: the purpose of the outreach, the audience for the outreach, the message or messages to be shared, the methods for sharing the messages, the timing for the outreach, and the process for evaluating the success of the dissemination effort.

Purpose

All dissemination should have a purpose and should support or inform project development in some way. The purpose of the activity may be to:

- Raise awareness—let others know what you are doing
- Inform—educate the community
- Engage—get input/feedback from the community
- Promote—‘sell’ your outputs and results

Defining the purpose of dissemination is a first step to decide on the audience, message, method, and timing of the dissemination.

Audience

The dissemination process depends on whom you want to reach and what they can do for your project. Therefore, the different individuals, groups, and organizations that will be interested in the project and its results need to be identified and informed. Develop the audience based on the results of the stakeholder analysis. The following audiences may be considered:

Internal Audiences

Keep members of the project consortium and your own institution well informed about the progress of the project. Adequate internal dissemination can also ensure that the project has a high profile within your PBRN.

Other PBRNs

Share project results with coordinators and key actors of projects dealing with similar topics, both within the program and in others, to ensure visibility and uptake of results, and provide opportunities to receive feedback, share experiences, and discuss joint problems and issues.

External Stakeholders

Reach out to people who will benefit from the outcomes of the project, as well as “opinion makers” such as teachers, researchers, librarians, and journalists, who can act as catalysts for the dissemination process. Share findings that can be used by a wider audience than the specific target group through newsletter articles, conference presentations, case studies, etc.



Message

Once the purpose and audience of the dissemination are clear, define the key messages. To that end, keep these communication principles in mind:

Messages Should Be Clear

Messages should be clear, simple, and easy to understand. Use language appropriate for the target audience, and use non-technical language where possible.

Messages Should Be Targeted

Tailor messages to the receiver(s). Carefully consider what they should know about the project. It is possible to send the same message to different audiences, but check the relevance of the message to the receiver each time.

Messages Should Be Actionable

After hearing the message, the target audience should understand what action(s) to take.

Messages May Be Repeated

Enhance impact by coordinating messages of different projects related to the same subject. Repeating key messages over time reinforces the messages with the target audiences.

Messages Should Be Factually Correct

Use plain language, and ensure that information is correct and realistic.

Methods

While there are a wide variety of dissemination methods, it is important to select the right one(s) to get your message to the target audience and achieve your purpose.

- Newsletters, flyers, and press releases can create awareness about the project.
- Reports, journal articles, and Web sites can transmit information about the project.
- Conference presentations and Web sites are ways to promote the project and its outcomes.

In addition to more traditional dissemination methods, it can be useful to use less typical strategies. For example, workshops or online discussion lists can yield a higher level of engagement from stakeholders. This may be particularly relevant for conflicting information or information that is likely to meet resistance.



Timing

When planning the dissemination, decide when different dissemination activities will be most relevant. The ideal timing will depend on the progress of the project as well as on the agenda of the target audience. For instance, at the start of the project, focus on raising awareness; at the end, on highlighting the achievements and deliverables. In terms of the “receivers” agenda, consider the time commitments of the target audience and stakeholders. For instance, acknowledge school or bank holidays, and when working with universities, remember that it will be difficult to reach academic staff at the start of the term or during examinations.

Evaluation of the Dissemination

Like all other elements of a project, dissemination activities are met with varying degrees of success. To determine if a dissemination strategy was well chosen and executed, build an evaluation component into dissemination activities to see if they have achieved their aims. For example, measure the success of a Web site by checking the usage logs; evaluate training sessions by asking participants to complete an evaluation questionnaire; and evaluate publications by the number of citations.

Resources

For more information on PBRN Dissemination, select the following links:

AHRQ Publishing Guidelines (Includes information on grant funded video production)

<http://www.ahrq.gov/research/publications/pubcomguide/index.html>

AHRQ Social Media Guidelines <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/publications/pubcomguide/pcguide4.html>

CDC Resources on Health Communication and Social Marketing <http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/>

Overview of Dissemination Methods

http://ec.europa.eu/eahc/documents/management/fact_sheet/Factsheet_6_Elaborating_dissemination_plan_OVEVIEW_OF_DISSEMINATION_METHODS.pdf

Basic Template for Dissemination Planning

http://ec.europa.eu/eahc/documents/management/fact_sheet/Factsheet_6_Elaborating_dissemination_plan_TEMPLATE_FOR_DISSEMINATION_PLANNING.pdf

Using Social Media for Dissemination

<http://network.socialmedia.mayoclinic.org/mccsm/>



For more information about the AHRQ PBRN Resource Center, please visit pbrn.ahrq.gov or email PBRN@abtassoc.com

