

Communications Planning Toolkit for Grantees

Guidelines for developing and implementing customizable communication strategies and tactics that align with the national **EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health in Primary Care** initiative. This toolkit includes:

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I. Communications Objectives and Strategies

AHRQ

AHRQ's **EvidenceNOW: Advancing Heart Health in Primary Care** initiative engages nearly 1,500 primary care practices to improve heart health among an estimated 8 million patients. The initiative aligns with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [Million Hearts®](#) national effort to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes by 2017. AHRQ's communications objectives and strategies in support of the initiative include:

- Support and facilitate communications with and among the grantees
- Provide EvidenceNOW initiative updates and patient-centered outcomes research (PCOR) evidence that can be disseminated through grantee communication channels
- Develop tools and resources for grantees to use in communicating with their partners and constituents
- Conduct proactive national outreach around initiative milestones and published data releases in a variety of formats, including journal articles
- Collaborate with key stakeholders, including Federal partners and their outreach networks
- Use AHRQ's communications channels, including Web site, blog, listservs, social media, and media contacts for initiative communication and outreach at the national level
- Use storytelling to share with key audiences the important work being done through EvidenceNOW

Grantees

EvidenceNOW grantees are working with participating small- and medium- sized practice clinics across the country to implement and evaluate quality improvement strategies for cardiovascular care. The following objectives and strategies might be appropriate for grantee communication efforts:

- Raise awareness of regional grantee teams participating in AHRQ's EvidenceNOW initiative
- Support retention of primary care practices within the initiative
- Build support for the initiative and for future investments in primary care transformation
- Elevate the value of using PCOR evidence in primary practice
- Increase visibility of the initiative through targeted media and social media outreach, using channels owned by the grantees and their partners
- Increase visibility of the individual practices participating in the initiative
- Use storytelling to share with key audiences the important work being done through EvidenceNOW
- Disseminate results, insights, and stories that emerge from EvidenceNOW regional and national evaluation efforts

II. Key Initiative Milestones

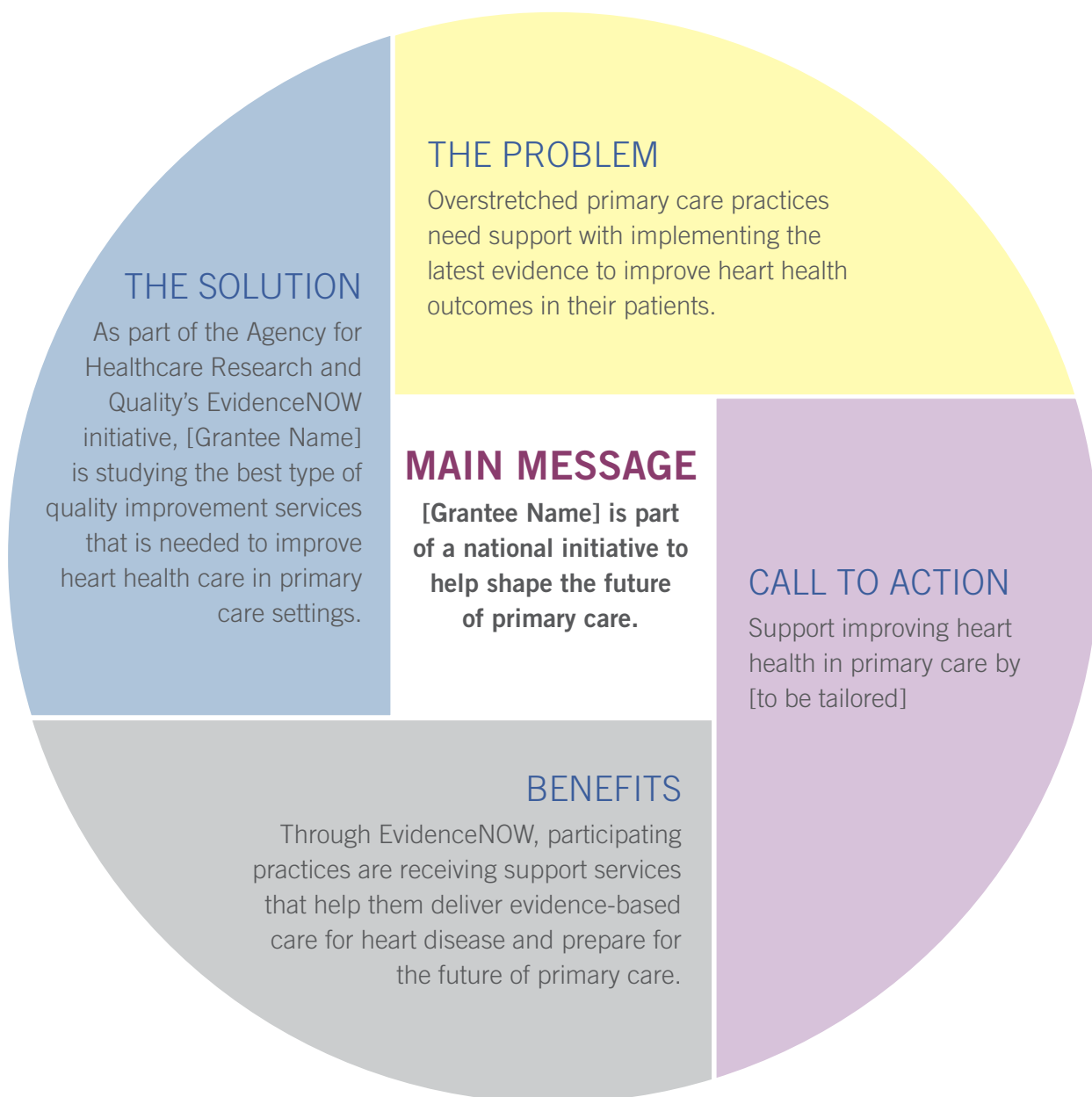
There are a number of important communication milestones the grantees can anticipate over the next 18 months to 2 years that will provide communication opportunities focused on specific content buckets. As the initiative evolves, so will the story arc and the narrative. Across all phases, the telling of patient, provider, and practice stories will help bring the EvidenceNOW story to life.

KEY INITIATIVE MILESTONES	TIMING	EVOLVING NARRATIVE *
Phase I: Recruitment	May 2015 – Feb 2016 Completed/ongoing dependent on study design	Program award and practice recruitment
Phase II: Implementation	Feb 2016 – Nov 2017	State of primary care What data says about capacity Benefits from participating in EvidenceNOW Practice transformation Initiative impact and lessons learned
Annual Meeting	June 2016	
AHRQ Web Content Update	June 2016	
Grantee Executive Summary Updates	June 2016	
Public Webinar	June 2016	
Baseline Data Completion	June – August 2016	
Baseline Results	December 2016	
Interim Results	Summer 2017	
Phase III: Evaluation	Nov 2017 – May 2018	
Final Results	Summer 2018	

*Brought to life through patient, provider, and practice stories.

III. EvidenceNOW Message Platform for Grantees

The following is a high-level messaging platform about the EvidenceNOW initiative tailored for use by grantees. It provides guidance for crafting communications and helps with maintaining messaging consistency across grantees. Additional messaging platforms will be developed to help communicate findings and impact. Please note that the Call to Action box should be tailored based on the audience being addressed in the particular communication effort. Examples of tailored calls to action are provided in the following section.



IV. Target Audiences

The EvidenceNOW story is relevant to a variety of audiences. Communication strategies will shift as the initiative evolves and data become available, and grantees will want to prioritize audiences according to those shifts. The table below lists potential target audiences, relevant communication strategies for those audiences, and potential calls to action for each audience sector.

AUDIENCES	COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES	CALL TO ACTION
Participating small- and medium-sized primary care practices	Support efforts to retain practices within this initiative; share initiative or news/updates/findings; provide PCOR resources	Stay involved and communicate your involvement to staff, patients, and community.
State/regional medical associations supporting primary care	Increase visibility of the initiative in the region; demonstrate thought leadership; communicate results	Join the conversation at #EvidenceNOW and follow the initiative at [<i>grantee Web site url</i>] or www.ahrq.gov/evidencenow .
Policymakers	Communicate value and importance of the initiative and of investing in primary care; demonstrate transformation; share EvidenceNOW findings and impact on primary care practice regionally and nationally	Support primary care practice transformation and join the conversation at #EvidenceNOW.
Patients (of participating primary care practices)	Raise interest in the initiative and communicate heart-health messages	Ask primary care professionals about the ABCS of heart disease.
Community at large, consumers, general public	Raise awareness of quality improvement efforts for heart health in the region, including AHRQ's EvidenceNOW initiative	Learn about the changes that are taking place in your community around heart disease at [<i>grantee Web site url</i>].
Media: health care, community news, policy-focused	Create awareness of the initiative, share findings, report results, and communicate practice and patient stories	Follow the latest developments at #EvidenceNOW and at [<i>grantee Web site url</i>] and www.ahrq.gov/EvidenceNOW .



V. Communications Channels and Tactics Guide

Planning for each communication activity should start with identifying the objective and the target audience(s). Once that is done, only then should a channel and tactic be selected. The grid below is a guide to help grantees make decisions about communication channels and tactics based on objectives and audiences.

Communications channels are mediums through which a message is conveyed to its intended audience. They include:

- **Traditional Media:** media that is generated by third-party journalists, rather than directly by an organization or brand. Examples of traditional media outlets include TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and their online counterparts. Earning publicity in traditional media requires building relationships with reporters, producers, and editors by reaching out to them with interesting story ideas, noteworthy updates, and newsworthy press releases. For tips on what traditional media look for in a story, see the next section.
- **Social Media:** online communication platforms dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. Prominent examples include Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Social media also includes online venues where people can share and comment on information with one another, such as message boards and forums.
- **Owned Media:** media that is generated directly by an organization or brand. Examples include organizations' own Web sites, newsletters, listserv updates, and blogs.

Communications Channels and Tactics Guide

AUDIENCE		MEDIA CHANNEL			
		Traditional Media	Social Media*	Owned Media	Other
Objective ► Support practice retention					
Associations	TACTIC	n/a	n/a	Updates on listserv/ newsletters	Webinars Presentations
Practices		n/a	n/a	Share initiative updates, new findings	
Objective ► Build support for EvidenceNOW and future investments					
Consumers	TACTIC	Local/regional media outreach on state of primary care to newspapers, radio, TV	Social posts w/ graphics <i>Twitter, Facebook</i>	n/a	
Policymakers			n/a	n/a	
Associations		Updates to Association PR and newsletter contacts	Social posts w/ graphics <i>Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In</i>	Updates on: - listserv/newsletters - Web site	
Practices		n/a	n/a	Updates on: - listserv/newsletters - Web site	Presentations
Objective ► Elevate the value of using evidence in primary care practice					
Consumers	TACTIC	Local/regional media outreach on state of primary care to newspapers, radio, TV**	Social posts w/ graphics <i>Twitter, Facebook</i>	n/a	
Policymakers			n/a	n/a	
Patients		n/a	n/a	n/a	Fliers on-site at practices Content for practice newsletters
Associations		Updates to Association PR and newsletter contacts	Social posts w/ graphics <i>Twitter, Facebook, Linked-In</i>	Updates on: - listserv/newsletters - Web site	
Practices		n/a	n/a	Updates on: - listserv/newsletters - Web site	Webinars Presentations

*Consider using social media channels of collaboration partners to expand reach.

**Include mention of AHRQ when pitching these stories.

VI. Coordinating Communication and Media Outreach Efforts with AHRQ

It's important that EvidenceNOW grantees alert AHRQ's Office of Communications (OC) of any planned traditional media outreach efforts (e.g., press releases, op-eds, and print or digital news articles). AHRQ has established relationships with national media and can also provide approved quotes from AHRQ spokespeople. Coordination between grantees and AHRQ's OC also helps to ensure that messages and information about EvidenceNOW are aligned and accurate. AHRQ will review your media content in a timely manner.

Please email Alison Hunt at alison.hunt@ahrq.hhs.gov and copy your EvidenceNOW project officer and TAC@evidenceNOWexchange.org when you or your extended grant team are planning to conduct any media outreach related to EvidenceNOW.

For more information, see the media and marketing section of AHRQ's Publishing and Communication Guidelines at: <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/publications/pubcomguide/pguide3.html>

VII. Tips for Effective Media Outreach

Below is a general “how to” for reaching out to local journalists to promote your EvidenceNOW stories. See section VII about necessary coordination with AHRQ and the EvidenceNOW Technical Assistance Center (TAC), the support team for the EvidenceNOW initiative, on media outreach planning.

Media are most likely to be interested in your story if you:

- Announce new, interesting, and noteworthy information from your project, such as results, that will be of interest to a large number of readers/viewers.
- Put them in contact with a subject matter expert or person with unique experience, such as a provider or patient, who can provide special insight into a matter and make a story “come alive.” When working with medical professionals or patients in this way, be sure to consider provider confidentiality (e.g., related to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA]) and patient privacy concerns.
- Build upon or “piggy-back” on current news or other trends receiving media coverage.
- Offer a bylined article or opinion piece authored by your organization, which fits in with a larger news trend.

Tips for contacting media include:

- Making a list of targeted media contacts at local newspapers, industry publications, and TV and radio stations, and updating it periodically.
- You can create a simple media list by using free, online resources such as MondoTimes.com and checking the Web sites of media outlets. The EvidenceNOW TAC team also has access to sophisticated media databases and can help you create more in-depth lists, if needed.
- Using the following tools to help disseminate your message.
 - **Press Release** - A press release is an official announcement used to inform the media about a newsworthy topic, trend, or interesting information. Press releases can be sent to local media contacts or distributed via a news service or “wire” to a wider list of reporters who review them to obtain story ideas. The best way to distribute a press release is via email so you can reach the reporter as quickly as possible.
 - **Pitch Email** - A pitch email is targeted to a specific reporter and offers news or a story idea tailored to the reporter’s interests, media outlet, and the outlet’s audience.
 - **Pitch Call** - A call to a specific reporter offering a story pertaining to the subject he or she is assigned to cover.

Additional Tips:

- **Follow up.** Learn the reporter’s preferred communication method, and contact him or her within a few days of sending the press release or pitch to gauge interest.
- **When emailing reporters, use clear, compelling subject lines.** Also, keep your pitch as concise as possible (breaking points up into bullet points can help), and use common language to get your point across.
- **Be persistent, but polite.** If a reporter declines your story, ask if it’s okay for you to stay in touch in case anything changes.

VIII. Communication Tools You Can Use

The TAC has been assessing EvidenceNOW grantee communication needs and tools. Based on feedback and grantee requests, the TAC is developing sample tools and materials for grantees to use for regional communication and outreach. The TAC will begin posting these materials in the File Library section of the EvidenceNOW Exchange. The tools and materials include:

- **Web badges** (currently available) – for participating practices to post on their Web sites showing participation in EvidenceNOW
- **EvidenceNOW practice flier** (currently available) – a fact sheet for patients at a participating practice office that explains EvidenceNOW and grantee activity
- **Editorial calendar** – Ideas and a calendar for potential outreach topics; content will align with AHRQ’s content strategy for national outreach.
- **Blog posts and blog outlines**
- **Media pitching tools**
 - Media lists (upon request)
 - Press release templates at key milestones
 - Story ideas and tips for story pitching
 - Sample op-eds, bylined articles
- **Digital tools and content**
 - Social Media 101
 - Content developed for social media

Grantees will be notified of new resources through announcements on the Exchange, monthly e-blast messages, and EvidenceNOW Webinars. Don’t see something you need on this list? Contact the TAC at TAC@evidenceNOWexchange.org.

IX. Communication and Outreach Reporting

AHRQ and the TAC are interested to learn how you are doing with your communication and outreach efforts. Please share your experiences by submitting your activities to the Dissemination Coordinating Committee (DCC) tracker. The tracker is available on the Exchange, and updates are submitted to the TAC from the grantees (the grantee DCC representative and Project Managers).