

Creating a Statement of Purpose

To plan a public health communications program, start with what sounds easy—a statement of why you want a plan. This is often more difficult than one anticipates because team members may have very different ideas or even goals. Yet, developing a communications plan is usually the work of a small team, coordinated by a communications officer who will execute most parts of the plan.

The first and most important decision the team will make is the reason for developing a communications plan in the first place. This reason is known as a statement of purpose. A statement of purpose can be short or long, but it must be clear.

Some brief, effective, sample statements are:

- ❖ “The Department will develop a strategic communications plan within the next two months in order to assure consistency, coordination, clarity, cost-effectiveness, and comprehensiveness in the use of all communications resources.”
- ❖ “In order to grow in numbers and capacity, our volunteer medical reserve corps program depends on effective communications with four groups: organizations that are potential sources of recruits, individual recruits, current members, and our professional staff. This will require an organized communications effort.”
- ❖ “This innovative inter-agency childhood obesity project must attain widespread support in the community in order to meet its goals: that all schools become junk-food-free, and that 85 percent of children ages 6–17 get at least one hour of exercise five days per week throughout the project area. We will build the necessary community support by using public relations, media relations, branding, outreach, and other activities as appropriate.”

Defining Your Core Concept

The statement of purpose leads directly to the core concept, or the idea that drives the entire communications enterprise.

Some sample core concepts are:

- ❖ “The Department is thoroughly committed to universal access, high quality, and reasonable cost containment in meeting all elements of the operational definition of a functional local health department, partly by sharing services with neighbor LHDs, by the year 2014.”
- ❖ “The newly restructured HIV/AIDS program is concentrating on reducing stigma, preventing vertical transmission, curtailing racial and ethnic disparities, and securing more in-home services.”
- ❖ “Oral health for seniors in nursing homes and other facilities is often neglected. Our project will bring dental evaluations, treatment, and ongoing prophylaxis to 100 elderly residents who otherwise could not afford these basic health services.”

Core concepts emerge from the mission of the department, program, or project, as well as from the statement of purpose. In turn, the core concept forms the basis of the strategy, the main message, and even the brand. There’s no reason to get stuck on distinctions among these different foundational statements. The substance is more important than how to divide it into the purpose statement, the core concept, and the overarching strategy.

Tip: Use the “Four P’s” of Social Marketing: Create an enticing product; keep the price low; make the product available in desirable places; and promote the product creatively.