

Communication in action

Guide Two
How to develop a
communications plan



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Introduction

Community Development Workers (CDWs) are central to implementing and delivering the Department of Health's 'Delivering Race Equality' (DRE) in mental health care programme. Evidence shows that individuals from some black and minority ethnic (BME) communities fear isolation and discrimination from both mainstream society as well as their own culture if they are to seek help for any form of mental illness.

This is why it is so important to use a communication route which target audiences will be comfortable with, and which they can respond to without fear of stigma or shame.



About this guide

This 'How to' guide is the second in a series of publications designed to help you to better understand your local BME communities and to work more effectively with them through the use of targeted communications activities that really work.

If you work in an organisation that has a communications or media team, it is important that you consult them before putting together a communications plan. They may be able to help you – or they may already have a plan in place that they can share with you. If appropriate, you might also like to think about buying in expert assistance if necessary on specialist areas such as design and copywriting, media handling, event management or PR.

To obtain copies of other issues in this series, please visit www.drenetwork.co.uk or email dre@forster.co.uk





Why do I need a communications plan?

Writing out a plan helps you to focus on your communications goals, set key deadlines and to identify in detail what needs to be done at each stage. It also helps colleagues and other team members know what they should be doing and when.

What should the plan look like?

Your communications plan can take the form of a simple table or list of stages (see the example at the end of this guide) with a different section for each of the following six main phases:

- Setting objectives
- Identifying your main audience
- Identifying your main messages
- Deciding which promotional methods to use and when
- Allocating costs and resources
- Measuring success

Setting objectives

What are we trying to do?

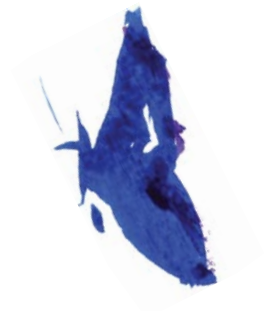
For example: to raise awareness of mental health issues, especially depression, amongst the local BME community.

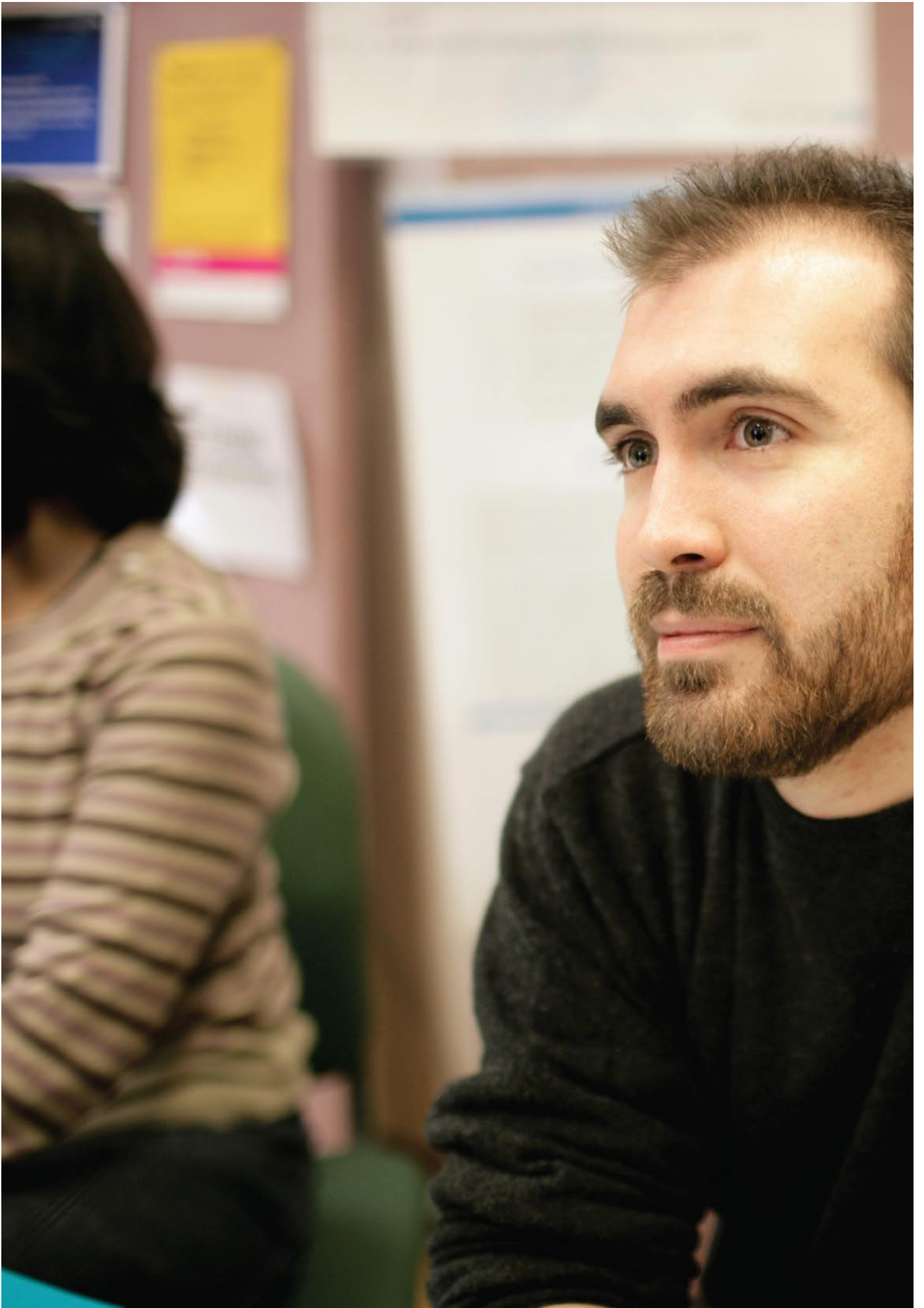
Why are we trying to do it?

For example: to reduce any sense of embarrassment or shame and to let people know about sources of help and support.

Top tip

Try to keep your objectives simple, clear, measurable and achievable within a relevant timescale.





Identifying your main audience

Who are the people I want to reach?
For example: the local Asian community.

Are they a particular age, race or gender?
For example: women aged 18 and over.

Do they live, work or socialise in specific places locally?
For example: many live within half a mile of the local secondary school and shop at the local supermarket.

Where do they get the information they trust from?
For example: local papers or community centres, friends and family.

What is their lifestyle like?
For example: they usually travel by local transport so posters on buses or at bus stops would work. Or, they collect children from school at 3pm so working with schools would be a good channel of communication.

Note: as well as your main audience, there are probably other people to whom you need to communicate the same messages, even though they are not directly affected. These could include colleagues, other local support groups, health workers and educators so add these to your list as well.

Top tip

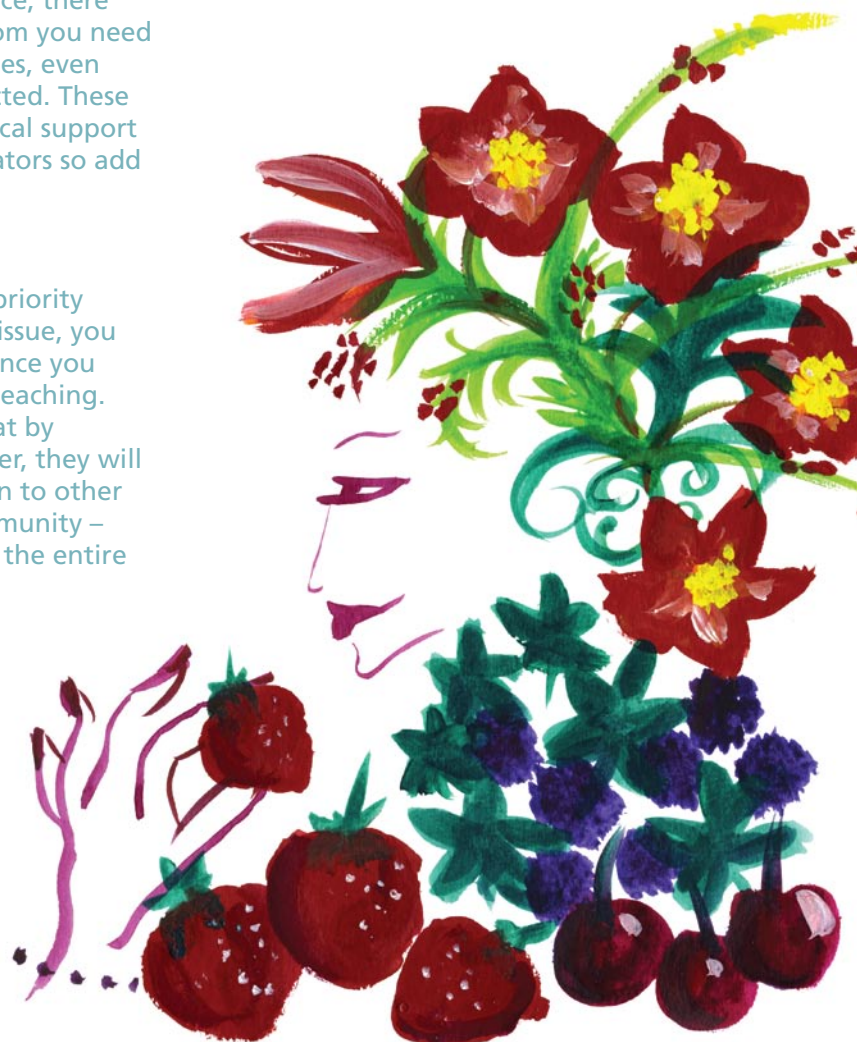
Try and rank your list in order of priority so that if time and money are an issue, you know which sectors of your audience you need to put the most effort into reaching. For example you might decide that by targeting women aged 18 and over, they will be able to pass the information on to other members of their family and community – and this saves you trying to reach the entire Asian population.

Identifying your main messages

Do I want to send out a general awareness-raising message or do I want to promote something specific, or both?
For example: I want people to realise that by attending my event, they can find out all they need to know about depression in a 'safe environment' in order to help themselves or their family and friends.

Do I need to convey a lot of background information?
For example: it is easier to signpost people to further information rather than tell them everything. So, advise people to look at a website or phone up a number for more details.

What do I want my audience to do as a result of getting my message?
For example: decide that they feel comfortable about attending the event and pick up the phone or look us up on the internet to find out more and to book a place.





Deciding which promotional methods to use and when

What is the best way of reaching my particular audience?

For example: a public event, as we want to reach such a lot of people.

Are there other publicity routes that are also of relevance to them?

For example: posters in the local supermarkets and schools will help advertise the event, and/or leaflets put through doors in the local area plus signposting people to our website.

Note: different audiences and different messages require different communications approaches. For example:

- Websites and leaflets are good ways to provide a lot of detailed information
- Letters, emails and posters are better for giving out detailed information on a specific issue
- Regular newsletters help get across general messages and communicate news, views and updates
- Press articles are effective at promoting an upcoming event or launch, a key development or for maximising publicity once an event has taken place
- Events are the best and most cost-effective way of reaching a mass audience

The method – or combination of methods – that you choose depends on a number of factors. For example, in one of the pilot projects we look at in Issue One of this 'How to' series, a CDW in Birmingham used a series of interviews on a local radio station to raise the general profile about mental health issues in the African Caribbean community. Thanks to the people who participated, a wide range of professional and service user viewpoints could be presented in a very short time. Additionally, because radio is a tried and tested method of reaching younger members of the community, this exercise was also particularly effective at communicating with teenagers.

Timing

Once you have identified your audiences, messages and publicity routes, you need to assess the most suitable date(s) to start promoting your messages. Indicate the month/date of each action that you identify in your communication plan, and ensure you build in enough time to organise, design and produce the material required. Additionally, if media coverage or photo opportunities are involved, you will need to check copy deadlines with the publication and work back from these to identify the dates you need to contact local journalists (more information on this is available in the 'How to' guide on working with the media).

Top tip

Depending on the type of community you are looking to reach, you might also have to consider translating your messages into one or more languages or formats to make them more accessible to different audiences. The Central Office of Information (COI) can provide best practice recommendations on both these issues.



Allocating costs and resources

Do we have the people and/or resources in house to cover all the work? If not, which specialist external services do we need to buy in?

For example: existing team members have the ability and capacity to plan and run the event but we will need a professional designer and copywriter to produce the information leaflet.

If so, how much will it cost?

For example: Approximately £200. Does this include all the hidden costs e.g. printing, additional time to deliver the changes and amendments to copy.

Note: you might also want to include some contingency money to cover any unforeseen developments, such as the opportunity to take advantage of an unexpected publicity deal or to address any crises or 'hot topics' that might emerge. You might also like to consider obtaining sponsorship from a local organisation to help keep costs down.

Top tip

If you need your finance people to give the go ahead on your costs before starting to put your communications plan into practice, make sure you set up a meeting or send them your plan in good time.

Measuring success

How do we know if we are reaching the right people?

For example: by monitoring the response to our communications or by holding a before and after focus group or questionnaire.

How do we know we are saying the right things?

For example: by asking the people who respond if and how the information helps them.

How do we know how people are acting on the information we communicated to them?

For example: by counting both the general numbers of enquiries and the attendees to our specific event. Pre and post campaign surveys in the form of questionnaires can also track shifts in perception and awareness.

What could we be doing differently to make more of an impact?

For example: holding similar, regular events in future and going back to previous attendees to invite them back, perhaps even to speak at the event themselves about their own experiences.

Top tip

It is very important for the success of any communications plan to review regularly how your audience are responding to your messages and, if necessary, to change what you are doing. While in the early stages of writing your plan, you therefore also need to be considering key dates at which to assess, and possibly adjust, your communications plan.

Once you know what works, keep doing it. Acknowledge the contribution made by all team members and communicate your experiences to colleagues in other regions so they can adopt similar strategies.

Sample communications plan – local event

Objectives	To give DRE in particular, and mental health in general, a higher profile within the local community	
Audience	The local south Asian community	
Message	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is lots of support available locally for people with mental health issues 2. There is no need to feel embarrassed to ask for it 3. Our forthcoming event will tell you about the places and people you can go to for help 4. Please register now to attend 	
Methods and key dates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters to leaders of key community groups • Meetings with key community groups • Posters and leaflets displayed and distributed around community locations and information posted up on websites • Door drops to residential homes • Promotion to individuals via phone if required 	<p>8 weeks prior</p> <p>6 weeks prior</p> <p>4 weeks prior</p> <p>2 weeks prior</p> <p>1 week prior</p>
Costs and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters, meetings and web publishing – internal staff • Posters and leaflets – external writer and designer required 	<p>(existing overheads)</p> <p>(£200)</p>
Measuring success	<p>By monitoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance figures on the day • Feedback via a brief questionnaire completed by attendees • Number of enquiries received before the event • Number of follow up calls received after the event • Number of visitors to the website • Amount of media coverage by local press, radio and tv 	



Have you found this guide useful?

We welcome feedback on this guide. We would also like to hear about any communications activities you are currently running in BME communities, and any lessons learned in the process that other CDWs might find helpful.

Please email any ideas and experiences to dre@forster.co.uk

Useful contacts:

General

- Department of Health:
www.dh.gov.uk
- NHS Choices:
www.nhs.uk

