Why It Matters

You know why it matters. Regardless of the time it takes to plan ahead and think your dissemination efforts through, a well-crafted plan has many virtues, not the least of which is increasing the likelihood that you’ll reach your users with messages and tools they can understand and use in their own life and work.

In the TA&D network, we share the underlying mission of improving results for children with disabilities. The path to that result is not very straight, meaning that most of us don’t work with children directly. But we sure do work with the people and systems responsible for the education and well-being of those children—parents, educators, administrators, related service personnel, early interventionists, you name it. The information and topical needs of each of these user groups vary tremendously, and so do the ways and reasons they’ll use the information, if they use it at all.

Which is, of course, the point and the bottom line: Utilization. We want our audiences to use the resources and tools we provide. A well-considered dissemination plan is an essential step in that quest.

Remember This List?

In the last issue of Disseminating for Impact (Volume 1, Issue 2), we introduced this list of 10 questions to ask when considering dissemination. That was just to get our feet wet.

10    Who’s your audience?
9    What do you want them to do with the info you’re sharing?

Now, waiting for you just one page turn away, we’d like to give you a strikingly similar list of elements to consider—again, 10. These are adapted from the fascinating work and products of the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research—NCDDR. We are especially indebted to NCDDR’s Developing an Effective Evaluation Plan, which couldn’t have said it better.

Which was why we did not try.
Elements of an Effective Dissemination Plan

Adapted from
Developing an Effective Dissemination Plan
National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR), 2001

1 **Goals:** Determine and document the goals of your dissemination effort.

2 **Objectives:** Associate each goal with one or more objectives that clarifies what you are trying to accomplish through your dissemination activities.

3 **Users:** Describe the scope and characteristics of the “potential users” that your dissemination activities are designed to reach for each of your objectives.

4 **Content:** Identify, at least, the basic elements of the projected content you have to disseminate to each of the potential user groups you’ve identified.

5 **Source(s):** Identify the primary source or sources that each potential user group is already tied into or most respects as an information source. Consider ways to partner with these sources in your dissemination efforts.

6 **Medium:** Describe the medium or media through which the content of your message can best be delivered to your potential users and describe the capabilities and resources that will be required of potential users to access the content of each medium to be used.

7 **Success:** Describe how you will know if your dissemination activities have been successful. If data are to be gathered, describe how, when, and who will gather it.

8 **Access:** Describe how you will promote access to your information and how you will archive info that may be requested at a later date. Consider that most people will use your info when they perceive a need for it—not necessarily when you’ve completed it.

9 **Availability:** Identify strategies for promoting awareness of the availability of your research-based info and the availability of alternate formats.

10 **Barriers:** Identify potential barriers that may interfere with the targeted users’ access or utilization of your info and develop actions to reduce these barriers.

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**Audience, Audience, Audience**

In the excerpt just provided from NCDDR’s *Developing an Effective Dissemination Plan*, the words “potential users” appear over and over again. That’s because there’s almost nothing more important in dissemination planning than **Defining Your Audience**. In fact, it’s nearly impossible to craft an effective and capacity-building resource, tool, product, or service without having a clear vision in your mind of who it’s for.

Oh, we can put a new resource or tool out there and tell people to “come and get it,” but it won’t be nearly as well received, let alone used, if it’s not relevant to the actual user. NCDDR captures this truth with the observation, “Consider that most people will use your info when they perceive a need for it” (p. 5). There’s no escaping that the relevancy of our materials are ultimately determined by our users. Only they can say whether a resource fits their need or not.

In terms of Defining Your Audience, it’s helpful to think small. Think targeted. Think in like-groups, meaning don’t lump all users together in how you design or disseminate a specific resource (unless, of course, all your users are more or less alike!). Teachers are different from parents are different from administrators are different from state directors. They may all need info on some aspect of educating children with disabilities—RTI, say—but they don’t all need the same info nor are they going to do the same thing with it. Address planning to individual user groups, not the General Public, and the fit of info to user will be much better, closer, tighter. Relevant!

Interestingly, the social media tools that are so the rage today offer us a near-perfect means of consulting with many of our audiences. The NDC is very excited to explore how the TA&D network can tap into the raw power and sheer numbers of people involved in social networking and exchange on the Internet. It won’t be the only tool in the dissemination bag, but it’s a mighty thrilling one.
More on Audience

The literature is replete with suggestions that can really help the TA&D network as disseminators, considering our audience variables from the very beginning. We’ve listed a sampling below, also drawn from NCDDR’s work, because all are food for thought when planning dissemination. These types of questions are especially helpful if you make them personal to your own world. For example, do you have products or resources in the works? Answer these questions in the context of what you’re planning.

- What user group or groups are the intended beneficiaries of your efforts?
- Have you sampled these user groups regarding info they’ve gotten from your project in the past to determine their satisfaction with its communication style, content of message, and accessibility?
- Have you collaborated with intended user groups to determine current dissemination goals and activities?
- Does the content of your info match the expressed informational needs of your user groups?
- Is info provided to users through the channels (auditory, visual, etc) they are known to prefer?
- What other projects or sources of help do your different user groups “go to” for info and guidance?
- Would collaborating with these other sources of help strengthen the credibility and receptivity of your info with your intended users?
- Are your user groups known well enough to describe such dissemination-related characteristics as their average reading ability, dominant language, level or scope of desired info, and accessibility requirements?
- What resources, knowledge, and info are needed by users to understand and apply your message?
- Does your content include “real world” examples and illustrations that communicate how to use the products? Do they tell users the benefits or results of doing so?
- How will you know if your dissemination activities have been successful? If data are to be gathered, who will collect it, when, and how?

Again, with thanks, adapted from Developing an Effective Dissemination Plan National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR)
Read More

If you’d like to read more from NCDDR or see what other master disseminators have to say on the subject, here are 3 to start:

- *Developing an Effective Dissemination Plan* (cited in this issue)
  www.researchutilization.org/matrix/resources/dedp

- *Dissemination Self-Inventory (NCDDR)*
  www.ncdrr.org/cgi-bin/selfinventory.cgi

- *General Characteristics of Effective Dissemination and Utilization*
  RUSH (Research Utilization Support and Help) | Authors: John Westbrook and Martha Boethel
  http://www.researchutilization.org/matrix/resources/gcedu/

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities is pleased to serve as the Dissemination CoP’s facilitator within the TA&D Network and to bring us together to discuss and orchestrate our dissemination efforts and strategies.

Your involvement is a vital part of realizing OSEP’s vision of a TA&D Network that plans, produces, and disseminates together, building on each other’s efforts to reach the widest audience possible in effective ways. Together, we share OSEP’s mission to improve results for children with disabilities. The tools that we put into people’s hands to do that can make all the difference in the world.

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