



Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) COVID-19 Communications Toolkit



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About ISANS

ISANS is the leading immigrant settlement service agency in Atlantic Canada, serving 10,000+ clients annually in 104 communities across Nova Scotia, through many kinds of services—language, settlement, community integration, and employment—both in person and online.

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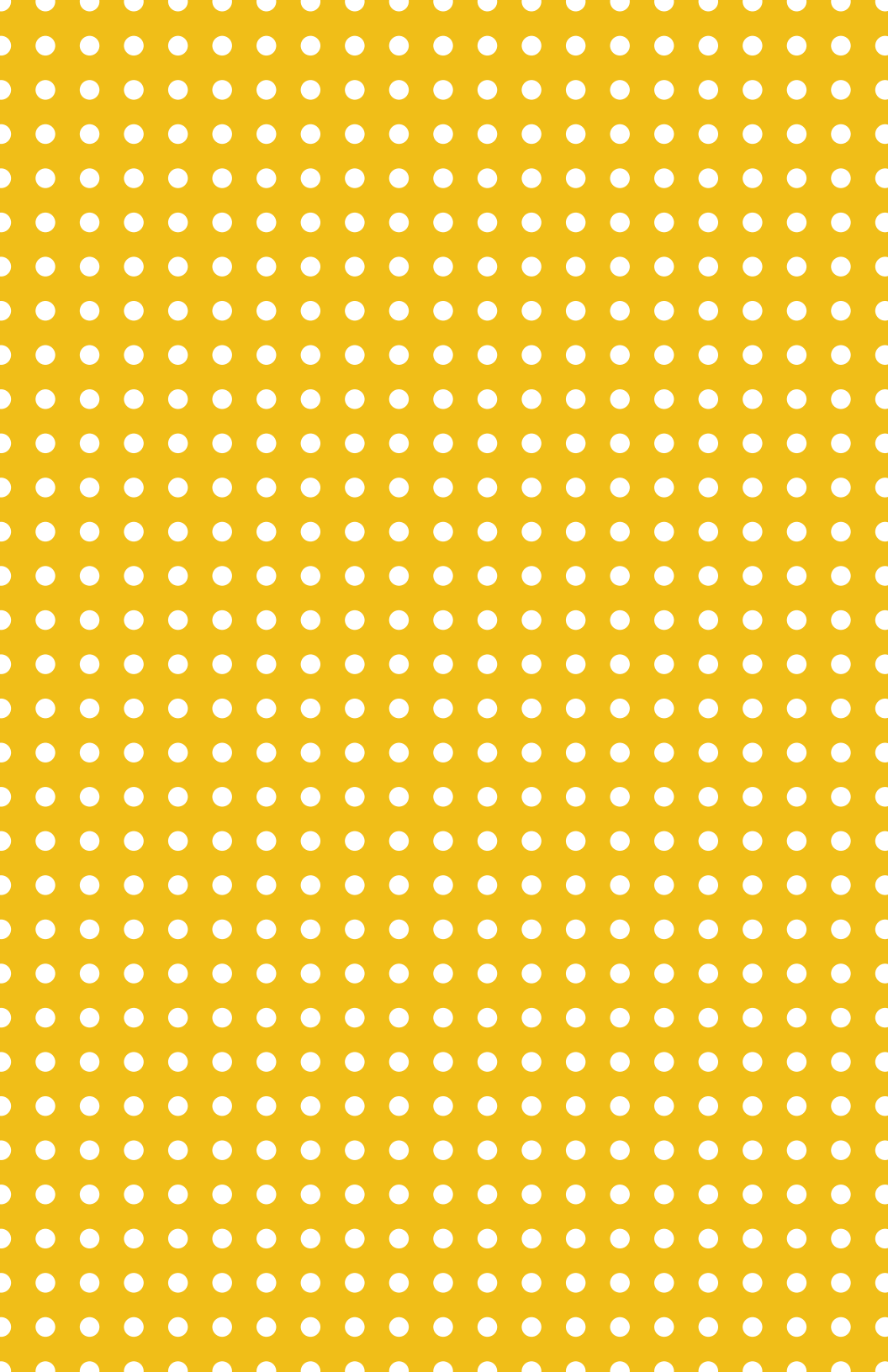
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, communicating complex health information to a diverse audience was critical to the overall response. While it is easy to think everyone understands and consumes information similarly, everyone has unique needs and preferences.

The pandemic forced us to adapt and find new and unique communication methods. This toolkit discusses how to build the capacity of individuals and teams to communicate with diverse audiences, particularly immigrants, regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The learnings and best practices in this toolkit cover four unique but intra-related areas of communication: writing, design, communications design, and teaching. The toolkit focuses on supporting the needs of immigrant populations, particularly those marginalized or vulnerable. These individuals could include those with low literacy skills—in reading, writing, and digitally—and those belonging to communities with distrust or the need for culturally relevant communication approaches. In times of crisis, these individuals may be the most impacted but the most difficult to reach with traditional techniques and practices.

This toolkit and its contents can also support new and emerging health-related communication needs and requirements an organization may face, such as other vaccination efforts or public health concerns.

If you have questions about this toolkit’s contents, please contact ISANS at [**toolkit@isans.ca**](mailto:toolkit@isans.ca) to learn more.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM COMMUNICATING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ISANS worked with many stakeholders throughout the pandemic to ensure the information they communicated about COVID-19 would reach immigrant audiences and, most importantly, be understood. Here are a few of the key learnings and considerations identified by ISANS:



WRITING

Clear and concise messages are important when discussing complex and hard to understand information. Plain language, prioritizing key information and checking your assumptions regarding how text will be read and understood ensure that those who have barriers and need the information can access it—essential for some, good for all.

KEY LEARNINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- » Use literacy and plain language approaches when communicating complex and challenging medical information. COVID-19 showed the importance of literacy and plain language approaches toward immigrant communities.
- » Break down complex medical terms with clear, simple language. Use tools such as the **Centre for Disease Control's (CDC) Everyday Words for Public Health Communication**.
- » Prioritize the essential information. To do this, you may need to use multiple posters or posts to break down complex information into its individual parts
- » Consider your vocabulary and grammar. Use simple, clear vocabulary and sentence structure when writing for your audience.
- » Break your information into bullets or numbers and use white space to define different sets of ideas. This will help define separate ideas into clear bite-size chunks for a reader to engage more easily.
- » Check your assumptions around tables, charts, and maps. Organizing your information this way can sometimes aid your reader, but it may confuse them. Information presented in this format does not emphasize essential details, as it all appears similarly on the page.

DESIGN

Design plays an important role in supporting a written message and helps convey complex health information in an accessible way. Consistency and clarity are important pillars of robust design approaches when communicating with literacy and marginalized communities.

KEY LEARNINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- » Consistent icons and photos are essential for conveying complex COVID-19 information. Continual reinforcement of these images or icons across multiple formats and messages will ensure their meaning is easily recognized when viewed.
- » Use photos that provide a literal representation of actions, places, or procedures to help individuals with literacy challenges understand intended actions. Always avoid abstract or non-literal representations.
- » Simplicity in design, removing unnecessary design features or decorations, and literacy friendly fonts are essential to convey complex information clearly to literacy audiences.
- » Use literacy-friendly fonts that resemble primary printing and avoid stylized flourishes or unique designs for specific letters. Examples of literacy-friendly font types include Comic Sans.
- » Use larger font size to make words easier to read and more identifiable. Font sizing will begin at 15pt or higher.



COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

Strong communications planning ensures that your message can reach and support individuals with a wide range of needs. From your strategy to how you will implement it, lots goes into making a comprehensive communications plan. Plan early and often for the best results.

KEY LEARNINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- » Create and identify strategies to communicate with hard-to-reach audiences before a crisis. Strategies include identifying community champions, internal staff who connect with these communities, or partners who can help share your message with these audiences.
- » Use ‘traditional’ communications approaches, such as word-of-mouth and print materials, to communicate with immigrant communities. An overreliance on sharing messages via digital media, such as social media, has left many immigrant communities without critical information during times of crisis.
- » Identify communication channels and tools that marginalized communities use, such as WhatsApp and community newsletters. Use these channels and tools to reach marginalized communities in broad and targeted ways.
- » Use multiple formats, such as audio files and videos. Using multiple formats can help individuals who have difficulty reading to understand complex information effectively through auditory and visual means.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

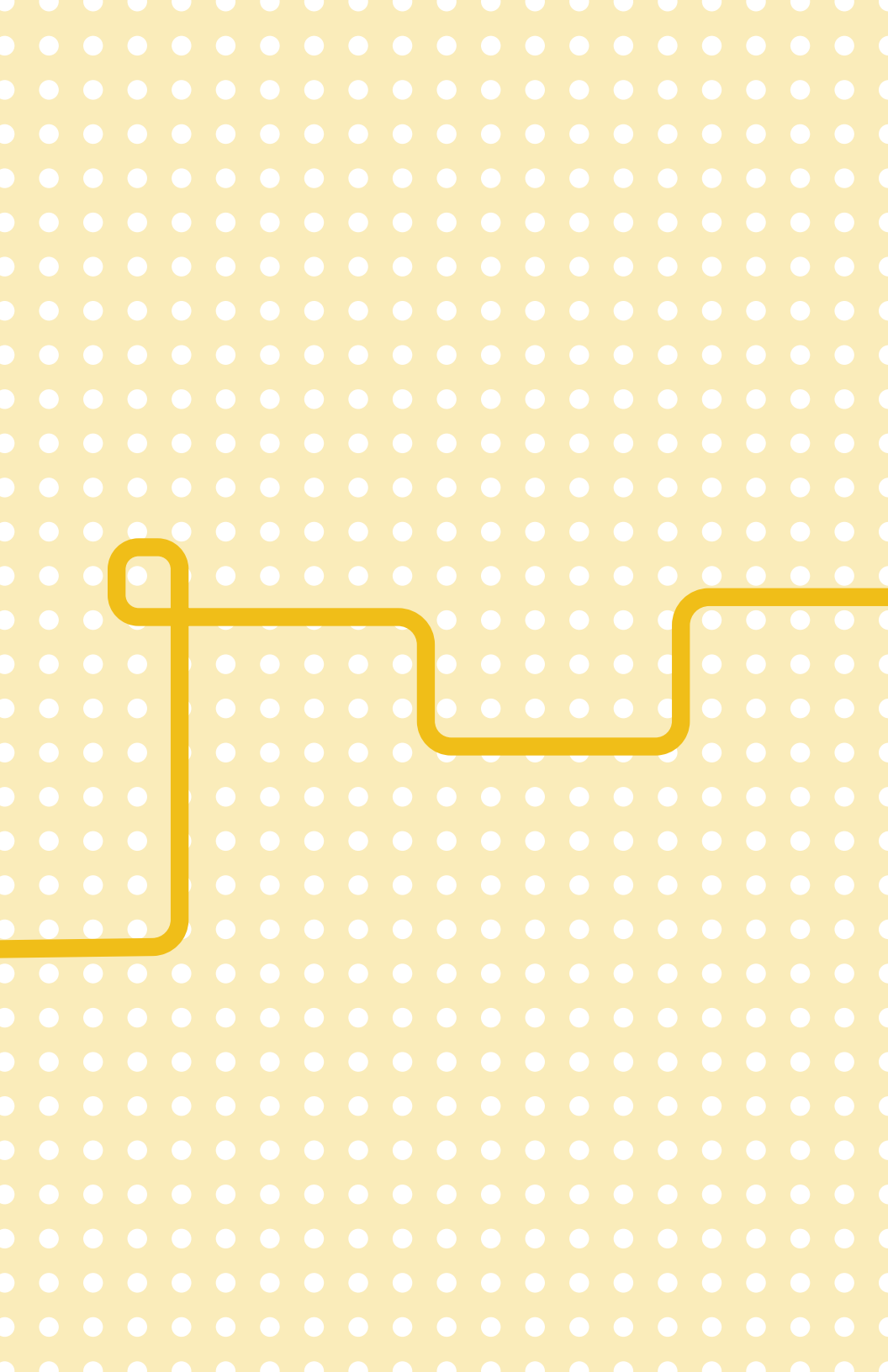
During times of crisis, it is important to take opportunities to teach individuals new complex information in a more comprehensive manner. These can be classes dedicated to topics such as COVID-19 or incorporated as part of other learning opportunities, such as an English as an additional language course.

- » Focus on overarching themes versus a specific topic. COVID-19 represented a particular public health crisis that quickly evolved with new information that made keeping information up to date for course materials difficult. Focusing on larger themes like health or vaccinations allows for examples from current situations to be used, while keeping the overarching modules consistent.
- » Information should be easily adaptable and not require advanced programs or software to make changes. Create a singular package that can be updated vs. smaller separate but related components that have many authors or owners.
- » Use an individual's primary language to convey health information where possible. Organize special online or in-person sessions that share information in your audience's primary language. Using an interpreter during these sessions allows audience members to take part fully by sharing their questions, concerns, or comments in real-time.

Complete Checklist for Communicating with Literacy Clients

- ☐ The following checklist offers an overview of the items you should consider when planning and assessing your overall communication approach with literacy clients.
- ☐ Have you considered your audience, their abilities, and their needs?
- ☐ Are you approaching your audience with adult learning principles.
- ☐ Does your material use plain language, avoid jargon, and use simple grammatical structures?
- ☐ Does your material emphasize essential information and use bullets to break up and make individual points clear?
- ☐ Does your design use a suitable font, font size, and white space?
- ☐ Does your design include clear and relevant pictures or well-defined icons?
- ☐ Are you considering the needs of each of your unique audiences? Can your approach be tailored or is it a one size fits all approach?





Four Pillars to Effective Communications

ISANS has identified four effective communications pillars supporting its ongoing COVID-19 communications with marginalized and literacy communities: writing, design, communication planning, and teaching and learning.

The following sections explore each pillar in more detail and provide best practices, tips, and insights to ensure you communicate complex health information to immigrant communities as clearly as possible.

WRITING

DESIGN

COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

TEACHING AND LEARNING

WRITING

Introduction

When writing for diverse audiences, it is essential to write in a way that is accessible and clear. The key to providing accessible writing is knowing your audience and their unique needs.

Essential for some, good for all reflects an approach that ensures those with both high and low literacy skills can read and understand a message. Writing copy needs to have a firm understanding of the unique needs of literacy individuals to achieve this approach.

In this section, we will explore the components of writing copy that understands the needs of your audience, practicing literacy-friendly grammar structure, writing formality, and the components of plain language.

Understanding your Audience

Understanding your audience is important to support clear communication with them in written form. Within marginalized communities, many individuals may face literacy challenges both in English and their primary language. It is often best to assume that if many members of a particular community have literacy challenges, to consider what is helpful for literacy-level clients as a basis for the message you create. Through this, you will help develop communications and clearer information for everyone— *essential for some, good for all*.

A reader may face cognitive overload when you write a difficult-to-understand copy laden with lots of jargon or complex sentence structure and placed in a cluttered design. Cognitive overload is when your audience struggles to understand your words and the message's visual space. Cognitive overload can make it difficult for your audience to understand your message. This means that all the work a viewer uses to understand the text is wasted, and your message will not achieve its aims or reach your reader.



Adult Learning Theory

Adults understand and take in information differently than children would be taught. Adult learning theory helps frame adult learning approaches and methods and provides individuals with information to learn.

Based on this theory, the following points should be considered in teaching adults' new information:

- » They have life experiences.
- » They have goals.
- » They learn better when the information is important to their life.
- » They need practical information.
- » They need to be shown respect.

On the last point of respect, this means meeting individuals within communities where they are in terms of their language. Even if they have literacy challenges, this means speaking to them like adults, not children. This extends to verbal and written communication, ensuring that resources are designed for adults, not children.

Practicing Literacy-Friendly Grammar and Sentence Structure

Keeping things simple when creating copy—the text within a given work—is crucial for literacy-level audiences. Individuals from marginalized communities may still be learning the basics of English. Many individuals with literacy challenges do not know what verbs are; therefore, they do not know that verbs change to reflect actions in the past and future. Therefore, keeping sentences in the present tense is more critical as they will more likely understand it.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » Use simple present with a basic verb (go, eat, drink, visit, call, pay)
- » Use simple past verbs (with -ed) at the end—cooked, visited, called; avoid irregular verbs with weird spelling—went, ate, had
- » Using ‘will’ for future tense is easier to identify than “am going to.” (i.e., I will see you tomorrow vs I am going to see you tomorrow.
- » Avoid ‘continuous’ (I am waiting for an appointment / I was calling my friend when...). Use simple present instead (I wait for an appointment / I call my friend)
- » Avoid perfect verb tenses (I have called you three times! / I had gone to the grocery store)

Checklist

- ☐ Keep it simple!
- ☐ Use simple verb tenses:
- ☐ Simple present
- ☐ Simple past
- ☐ Future “will” + verb
- ☐ Avoid continuous and perfect tenses

FORMAL AND INFORMAL

While many organizations may err on using formal language, particularly in healthcare settings, it is often much more accessible for individuals to understand informal language. Here is an example of formal vs. informal language.

Formal

- a. *I am so sorry to bother you, but I would like to know what time your appointment is to get vaccinated with the doctor today. I believe that you are already here too early and must leave and arrive only five minutes before your scheduled time!*

Informal

b. Hi. What time is your appointment? Thanks!

When using formal language, individuals or organizations will often use big, professional words like ‘utilize’ and ‘receive’ along with complex grammatical structures. Instead of creating clarity, this approach can confuse. Replace these words with simpler synonyms such as ‘use’ and ‘get.’

Most words in English can be represented by using a synonym or a phrase with the same meaning. Generally, formal words have a Latin base in English, but it is usually possible to find shorter words with a Germanic base. Examples of this include “Ask” (Germanic-based) vs. “Inquire” (Latinate) or “Baby” (Germanic-based) vs. “Infant” (Latinate).

Always keep your audience in mind: you are wasting your time if you want to use formal language and expect low-level clients to understand. Remember there is a time and place for formal language but using simple language can make understanding complex medical information easier.

Things to Avoid when using Informal Language

- » Expressions and idioms (Once in a blue moon...; I have a frog in my throat.)
- » Phrasal verbs (e.g., Drop off, take off, give up).
- » Jargon specific to your program or activity.
- » Abbreviations or Acronyms.
- » Anything long and complex.

USE METRIC

Regardless of our clients’ language skills, it’s safe to say that many immigrants come from countries where they use the metric system.

Any opportunity to use the metric system will benefit all. Essential for some, good for all!

.....

Understanding the written communication needs of literacy-level clients:

- » Need to learn English *AND* how to learn.
- » Lack of confidence in their learning.
- » Learn from doing and watching.
- » Repetition helps memorize information.
- » Difficulty understanding that learning to read is a process.

Understanding how they learn:

- » Limited formal education
- » Listening, speaking, reading, writing *plus* learning how to learn:
- » Organize
- » Transfer
- » Sequence
- » Recognize patterns
- » Learning is s-l-o-w!
- » Repetition
- » Good & bad days

Checklist for Understanding Literacy Audience

- ☐ Think about your audience
- ☐ Remember “Essential for some, good for all”
- ☐ Consider the unique needs of Literacy clients
- ☐ Remember Adult Learning Theory

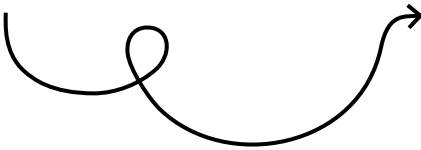
Creating Plain Language Copy

Plain language is a writing approach that emphasizes clarity and simplicity in written copy. This approach ensures that the information you present is clear and easily understood.

In short, you are writing in plain language if your readers can:

- » Find what they need;
- » Understand what they find;
- » Use your information to meet their needs.

The plain language checklist provides helpful reminders to keep in mind when writing copy for diverse audiences.



**SNAPSHOT:
THE CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL
AND PREVENTION (CDC) EVERYDAY
WORDS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH COM-
MUNICATIONS**

Medical language can be complicated to understand and laden with jargon, making it difficult for the message to be concise and clear. Everyday Words for Public Health Communication offers expert recommendations from CDC's Health Literacy Council and other communicators on reducing jargon and improving reader understanding.

You can search for public health jargon or plain language words and find alternatives and example sentences.

**Plain language
checklist**

- ☐ Were abbreviations spelled out on first use and shortened versions placed in brackets after?
- ☐ Presented thoughts in a logical order and in separate sentences?
- ☐ Used titles and subtitles to break up ideas (where applicable)?
- ☐ Used parallel phrasing bullets and numbered lists?
- ☐ Addressed the same reader through the entire document?
- ☐ Used familiar words and avoided jargon?
- ☐ Used bullets to list items and numbers to show process or sequence?
- ☐ Avoided use of idioms (a group of words whose meaning is not deducible from the individual words used, i.e., "Hit the hay," meaning "Go to sleep")?
- ☐ Used short sentences (where possible)
- ☐ Avoided use of negatives
- ☐ Used personal pronouns to express the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person points of view

DESIGN

Introduction

Design plays an integral part in conveying a message and supporting written text. For many individuals, particularly those with literacy barriers, design can help break down language barriers and ensure they can connect and understand a message with minimal help.

Good design that supports complex messages uses a mixture of simple fonts, accessible icons, and a good grasp of using white space as part of an overall visual landscape.

The following section explores design principles to ensure that your message is clear, easy to understand, and accessible to a wide range of audiences.

Using visuals

Visuals are essential in conveying complex information, such as COVID-19 vaccines. Throughout the pandemic, many organizations used visuals to communicate to varying degrees of effectiveness when reaching more specialized audiences, such as immigrants.

The following section discusses some main design principles when designing COVID-19 materials for immigrant and literacy-level audiences.

Literacy-Friendly Principles and Key Considerations

Please follow these literacy-friendly design guidelines when developing your materials.

- » Keep designs as simple as possible. This may include removing logos and keeping competing colours and design elements to a minimum to ensure critical text-based information stands out.
- » Use fonts that resemble primary style hand printing, such as Comic Sans. Avoid using fonts with serifs or using unique designs for individual letter designs.
- » Use larger font sizes as part of the design to make the information clear and easy to read.
- » Ensure consistent use of icons and images. Reinforce icon and photo meanings through repetitive use and similar placement.

Using Visuals Guidelines

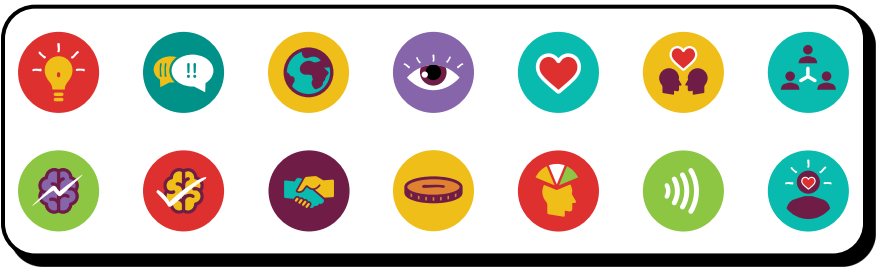
CONSISTENT USE OF ICONS

Icons convey complex information in a sort of visual shorthand.

Consistency is critically important when selecting and using icons. Consistency includes how a designer designs an icon—use of line weight, fill vs. no fill—to the information they convey in their depiction of action.

Early in the pandemic, many teams, even within the same organization, would use different designers and icons to represent similar information. These differences in design would often create confusion among individuals regarding what these icons might convey.

For easy-to-understand icons, it is essential to follow these icon key considerations.



ICONS KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » Action or subject in the icon must be depicted clearly and without abstraction.
- » Ensure icons are consistent across all materials. Do not introduce new icons or change the design of icons without context or communication.
- » Icons for literacy-level individuals may require more details that would otherwise not be included in other icon designs.
- » Keep fill colors simple. Ideally, literacy-friendly icons can appear with no fill at all.
- » Avoid the use of symbols and emojis. Emojis can have diverse cultural meanings, which can cause communication difficulties (e.g., emojis with their tongue stuck out can be considered taboo in some cultures).

SNAPSHOT: COVID-19 SYMPTOMS ICONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Before the advent of the pandemic, ISANS had begun to design icons for the emergence of a novel virus that would become COVID-19. ISANS initially created these icons as hand-drawn pictures representing five core symptoms. As more information emerged regarding COVID-19 as it spread around the world, the overall list of symptoms became much longer.

ISANS' initial approach to creating custom hand-drawn symptoms made it difficult for us to replicate the designs as new symptoms appeared. Over the following months, ISANS created a unified set of COVID-19 vector icons that it would use across all its direct communications with staff, clients, and partners.

During this time, ISANS also used a related but unique set of icons that depicted actions more clearly for literacy audiences. The icons were taught to literacy learners through class materials and used when working directly with literacy clients.

Importance of Photographs

Photographs are important for literacy audiences to convey a particular action or scene. As a literal representation of a place or activity, photos help viewers identify and learn more efficiently. Use photographs showing diverse audiences undertaking these actions or being in the areas represented whenever possible.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » Be literal with your choice of photographs. Choose photographs that represent the action the collateral is discussing—e.g., to illustrate the action “teaching,” choose an image that shows a teacher teaching vs. a stack of books.



- » Avoid photographs that are abstract or unclear. For example, do not use an image of a pharmacy to stand for a community clinic vaccine clinic.
- » Represent diverse individuals from different ethnicities, cultural groups, and abilities in your photographs.

Focus on Simplicity

Simplicity in terms of design enables flexibility when working with multiple audiences and languages. Simple design does not mean something does not look and feel great, instead it gives the viewer the space to explore and view the content.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » If creating a poster in multiple languages, you should try to create a design that can be used with copy that reads both left to right (LTR, such as English) and right to left (RTL such as Arabic). This focuses on creating design elements that can be reflected or orientated by LTR or RTL.
- » Remove any unnecessary design elements that do not support the message being conveyed. This can include a graphical background or logos in some instances.
- » Explore the use of white space as a design element. The creative use of white space can add to a design and create visual interest.



Literacy Friendly Fonts

Choosing the correct font is essential when creating literacy-friendly designs. Fonts used in design typically appear in two different formats, serif—small structural and design details as part of the letter—and sans serif—letters that appear without these symbols. Specifically for literacy learners, using sans serif makes it easier for them to understand and read a message.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » Use a sans serif font that mimics primary hand printing. The primary font suggested for literacy-friendly design is Comic Sans. Alternatives that can be used include Comfortaa, or Ubuntu.
- » Avoid the use of fonts with effects, styles, or other embellishments at the end of the letter strokes.
- » Avoid the use of fonts that give unique designs to a specific letter. Letters on which these types of embellishments typically appear include ‘A’ ‘J,’ ‘G,’ ‘Q.’ Check for these embellishments on both the capitalized and lowercase versions of the letter, as they may appear only on one or the other.
- » Make sure to keep text alignment consistent and straightforward. Ideally, fonts should be aligned left. Refrain from using centre, right, justified font, or unique, atypical alignments that support a unique visual design.



Comic Sans - Regular

1234567890 !@£\$%^&*()-=+

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Comic Sans - Bold

1234567890 !@£\$%^&*()-=+

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

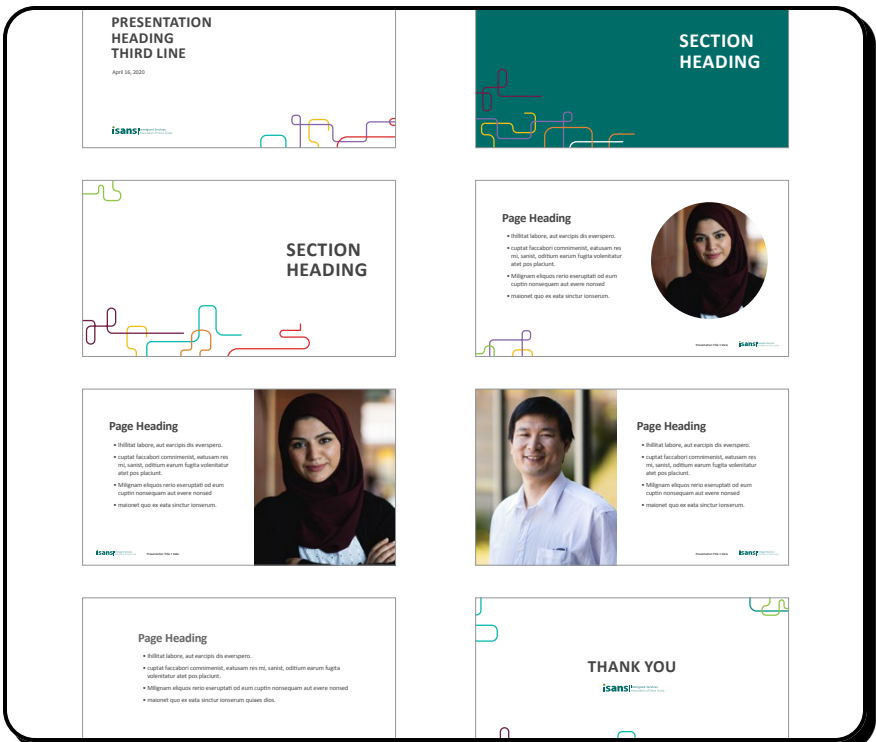
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Use of White Space

White space refers to unused space on a page. Visual clutter can make it difficult for marginalized individuals with low-level literacy to find information. Literacy learners view all words as having equal value to each other. When used effectively, white space is as much a part of the communication as the text or photos are.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » Use white space to make information stand out and make writing clear to read.
- » Avoid cluttering the space with unnecessary elements, such as colour bars, motifs, marks or too much text.
- » Plan out how you will include whitespace and how this will change the amount of information that can be included.



Translation Copy Design Toolkit

Translating poster content is important to reach a broad audience. If you work with a diverse audience, your designer might need to work in a language they can neither read nor write.

Use this t-chart format to help with the design of multilingual posters.

How to use the chart

- » Depending on your design, you may want to translate lines of a copy either singularly or together. Taking the lead from your designer about these copy groupings is essential.
- » Depending on the language, this t-chart might need to be created in two different documents to support left-to-right and right-to-left writing formats. Some word processing formats do not support R to L and L to R in the same document.

English Copy to Translate	Poster Location/ Designer Note	[insert language] Line Translation
Headline Copy		
Sub-deck Copy		
Description Copy		
Call to Action Copy		
Footer Copy		

SNAPSHOT:

INSTALLING ADOBE CREATIVE CLOUD IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

You can change the installation language settings for the Adobe Creative Cloud App you are using, which will help make it possible to design in languages, such as Arabic, that read right to left.

You can learn how to change the language of your creative cloud apps here: <https://helpx.adobe.com/ca/creative-cloud/help/change-install-language.html>

You cannot have the same application installed simultaneously, so you either need to uninstall and reinstall that version of the app or install another version of the app.

Maps

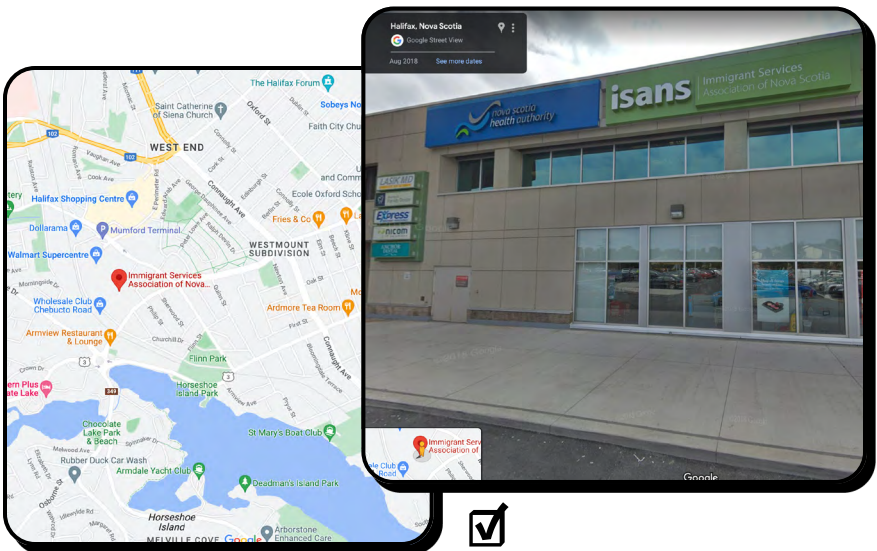
Maps are beneficial to show the locations of vaccine clinics and other COVID-19 or health-related services. However, maps can be very abstract and difficult to read for marginalized populations. Many maps provide a perspective—from a birds-eye view—that is not a view that many would have of the city they live in.

For low literacy individuals to understand a map, they need to have the map placed (i.e., “This is Canada”) and then make it relevant (i.e., “Here is Nova Scotia”) before you move to the area on the map you want to target. This map reading example illustrates that lots of support is needed before you assume clients can place themselves on and within the map. It is best to assume that an individual may not recognize the shape or outline of the city in which they live.

Thanks to GPS, many marginalized individuals may skip the steps of reading maps and wait to be told which way to go.

It is best to offer multiple ways to use a map. For example, add a QR code that links directly to a mapping software alongside a map, giving individuals an extra support layer.

Another choice is to find a clear, real-life, street-view photograph of the landmark you’re referring to: clients are much more likely to be able to orient themselves when looking at a familiar neighborhood.



WHAT3WORDS SNAPSHOT

What3Words dissects the entire world into discrete 3m by 3m squares, each shown by a non-repeating set of three words that identify each box. This unique combination of words enables you to share location information for hard-to-find places or buildings that may not have a street address, identifiable feature, or landmark.

Each square's three words are available in 54 languages, making it accessible to many audiences. Users can use the What3Words maps to navigate from their current location and their new location.

You can access What3Words in your browser—www.what3words.com—or download the app in the Google or Apple App store by searching What3Words.

DESIGN CHECKLISTS AND TOOLS

Design Checklist

To design COVID-19 or other related health materials for low literacy clients, use the following checklist to assess its effectiveness.

Design Element	Key Consideration	Yes/No
Icons	Do all icons use a similar design or visual approach?	
	Do you use the same icon to stand for each action or concept?	
	Is the icon subject matter easily recognizable?	
Use of Photographs	Do the photos clearly represent the action or place intended?	
	Do the photos represent diversity in their subjects?	
Poster Simplicity	Does the poster include only necessary design elements that do not distract or obscure the poster's	
	Does the design only highlight fonts, icons, or images that help support the message?	
	Can the design be 'reflected' to accommodate poster designs that read left to right and right to left.	
Fonts	Are the fonts clear, without extra flourishes such as serifs?	
Colour	Are the colors kept to a minimum and used only to emphasize essential information?	
Use of Whitespace	Does the design use lots of whitespace	
	Is the text clearly able to be read and does not compete with other visual elements	

COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

Introduction

Working with diverse audiences who access, understand, and receive information differently creates unique communication opportunities and barriers for practitioners to manage and overcome.

Prepare your organization with good planning practices to convey complex information in an easy-to-understand format and approach. Through the pre-development of strategies and plans, you will be better prepared to respond quickly and adapt your message or approach, as necessary.

While digital communication has made connecting with distant and dispersed audiences easier, it may miss the most marginalized individuals facing literacy hurdles. Effective communication planning looks at how your audience receives and conveys information and understands their unique needs.

Building a Strategy and Plan

The first step in supporting complex health messages on topics such as COVID-19 is to make a strategy and plan. These documents will guide what and how you will communicate and consider the unique needs of the audience you are looking to reach.

When you undertake your communications, strategies, and plans, they do not need to be dense, complex, or fully complete. However, strategies and plans will be essential to ensure that individuals across your organization coordinate and all move in one direction.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUILDING A STRATEGY AND PLAN

- » Before a crisis or incident, consider developing a framework for how your organization, departments, and staff will respond.
 - Do you have the necessary resources internally to respond, or will you need to work with third-party consultants?
 - Do you know how you would reach your audiences in a crisis? Would there be anything different than how you typically communicate with them?
 - What is the decision-making process at your organization? Who needs to be involved as part of the communication strategy and planning?

- » Create a template (see below for a basic communications plan outline to get you started) to help you respond quickly. Create one for each unique scenario.
- » Regularly review and update your strategy and plan. Include those integral to the plan as part of these updates. Keep a log of relevant updates and who took part.

The ‘LEGO’ Approach

When developing your strategy and plan, there are many approaches one can take. The ‘LEGO’ approach helps create scalable and replicable communication outputs and information to share with a diverse audience. The LEGO approach helps keep your message consistent and manageable to implement, even within a small team. Additionally, it supports a consistent way to engage and approach information that makes it both uniform and manageable. It short, it designs a system and approach that is both replicable and scalable within the confines of a given individual or team’s ability.

The LEGO approach is based on two fundamental principles: creating a common knowledge base and transforming that knowledge according to the medium used.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS USING THE LEGO METHOD

- » Be thoughtful of what and how a person receives and uses information. What do they want to know, how will they use it, and how will they share it with others?
- » Look to understand how content fits, is consumed, and interacted with via the communications channel used.
- » Keep things small and simple. What can you achieve with the time and the budget you have available?
- » Plan for backlash and negative reaction.
 - What communications channel will you use?
 - What backlash or feedback do you need to address? What can you ignore?
- » How does your work fit with that of others?
 - Can you amplify others’ messages? Provide a platform for a little heard voice or perspective?

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SPOTLIGHT:

THE FOUNDATION OF THE LEGO METHOD

Building a common knowledge base

A knowledge base refers to the content that will be used to support your message or communication campaign. Information is often written or organized in several ways in large complex organizations. To create consistent and easy-to-adapt information, it is crucial to centralize the information to be shared and ensure a consistent voice and editorial approach. Information is synthesized as part of a common knowledge base for consistency and ease of use across different communication mediums.

Transforming knowledge accordingly

Transformation refers to how this information is changed depending on the communication method. Transformation of information will ensure that the information you share will be clear and easily understood by the audience you are hoping to reach. Remember, each medium you use will allow you to share distinct types of information and be more effective than others.

Benefits of the Lego Approach

- » Enables a modular design approach—creation of distinct but interchangeable content pieces
- » Adapt and share information efficiently, effectively, and quickly depending on your communication medium, format, and audience.
- » Develop consistency in terms of how content and knowledge are organized, developed, and disseminated internally with staff and clients, externally with partners, funders, community members.
- » Create a common frame of reference or knowledge pool for diverse stakeholders.

Achieving Communications Success at a Smaller Scale

Many organizations have limited capacity to undertake large communication campaigns. To achieve success on a smaller scale, use the following key considerations.

» **Focus is key**

- Identify and use one story to share, one key audience you want to reach and identify SMART Goal(s) that can help support and measure your success.

» **Leverage partners**

- When and where possible, engage with partners to help you amplify your message. Using partners, you can stretch your budget, and further access your primary audience.

» **Use data to help fill the gaps and build content**

- Use data to help you tell your story. Statistic Canada, trade organizations, business improvement districts (BIDs), and non-profits among others typically share policy papers and statistics they have collected, which you can use as part of your message and story. These data points are free and often in ready-to-use graphics for social media or other communication mediums.

» **Plan small strategic investments**

- Making strategic investments in skill building for staff and in equipment to support design, photography, and story development can help keep budgets manageable while supporting the capacity building of your organization. When creating or hiring individuals to create this content, focus on reusability and it being ever-green—materials that are not time specific that can be regularly reused—and use current projects where possible to develop the materials needed.

Using Parallel Communications

Parallel communication is sharing the same message across multiple channels and mediums simultaneously. Parallel communications are typically used in emergencies, where an alert or critical piece of information is shared across various channels, such as text messages, phone calls, social media, and website posts. This approach ensures that the message is reinforced and available to a recipient's preferred mode or medium of communication.



When working with culturally and linguistically diverse audiences, parallel communications help ensure that your message will reach a wider number of individuals vs. just using one or two communications methods.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS WITH PARALLEL COMMUNICATIONS

- » Where possible, use the same copy and images to go with the message. Parallel communications will help reinforce the message if a recipient across multiple channels sees it.
- » Understand the mediums you plan to use to share your message. Each medium will have opportunities and limitations regarding the message you can share. Understanding your mediums will make planning and adapting your message more efficient and effective.
- » Consider setting up a message hub, such as a feed on a website, so all the messages you send out about a particular topic will be accessed easily. A messaging hub ensures that any updates can be shared quickly and provides a centralized spot for individuals to find a message they may have missed otherwise on another platform.

ORGANIZING YOUR RESPONSE

Use the worksheet here to develop your communications plan. If your organization lacks ability or has a limited budget when coming up with your response, scale your communications accordingly in your planning.

This section explores the different areas that make up a basic communications plan and the questions you want to answer when writing these sections.

Objectives

The objective is to help frame your communications thinking and planning. Think of it as a vision or mission statement. Will the actions you are taking help support your mission? Be specific and keep it concise. It should only be one sentence, no more than two.

- » What do you want to achieve with your communications?
- » Does the objective relate to the organization and its work?
Is it mission-critical?

- » What does the objective say about the audience you want to reach?

Key Messages

Key messages help keep your messaging consistent and reinforce your primary aim. Key messages should be like a good tweet: short, snappy, and memorable. Think of your key messages as a series of pillars that support your overall objective. Weak key messages won't help your aim stand strong.

- » Try to write out three key messages. When writing key messages, add supporting points where applicable.
- » Link back to the mission/vision of the organization. Linking your mission/vision helps reinforce your 'brand' and illustrates why you have an essential voice on the issue.
- » Use stats and anecdotes, but not too many. One or two stats can help bring life to a story and create an impact. If you use it more, you risk confusing your audience or, even worse, yourself when trying to tell your story.

Audience(s)

Without an audience, you do not have communication. To create successful communications strategies and plans, the audience completes the other side of the equation and is one of the most essential aspects you need to keep in mind. The more you understand your audience's perspective (and do not project or assume how they receive or consume information), the more likely they are to hear your message and act upon it.

- » Answer the "5 W's" about your audience:
 - Who (who are they, their profession, relationship with the subject);
 - What (motivations);
 - Where (where is this audience found, social media, newspapers, letters);
 - When (is there a particular time hook—a recent event or day of remembrance/recognition, etc.— that is important?);
 - Why (why should they care, what is in it for them); and
 - How (what tools and tactics are you going to use)?



- » Look for shared values with your audience
 - What do you and your audience have in common? Think of ideas of family, children, or community beyond complex concepts of morality and ethics.
- » Be specific; do not be broad. The more specific you can be about your audience, the more conscious and reflective you can be in your messaging with your limited time and budget.

Tools

Tools are the materials you have or will use to carry your message forward. Think of brochures, one-pagers, annual reports, social media posts, or blog posts (to name a few) that can help build your communications on a particular subject.

- » Think first about what you have and could use as it exists currently or with some simple adaptation. The more you reuse material, the more it helps reinforce your overall message, creating consistency and brand identity.
- » Look for evergreen content. This type of content is long-lasting and does not have a specific time limit where it may become irrelevant. Evergreen content also helps build an ongoing pool of content you can use as needed.

Tactics

Tactics are where all the other sections come together and decide how to share your message. Remember to choose your tactics according to your audience and objectives. If a tactic does not match these, ensure not to include it.

- » Think small and simple. Do what is in your ability to achieve, and do it really, really, well.
- » Consider what tactics you control, such as websites and social media platforms, and which you do not, such as Op-Eds. Make sure you have a mix of tactics to invest your time wisely and get maximum coverage.

The difference between a tool and a tactic

How a message is packaged (a tool) is different than how that message will be distributed (tactic). There are some cases when a tool and tactic can be one in the same, an e-newsletter or brochure, but typically tactic will go a step further in defining distribution methods and how an audience will be reached vs. just the information present within a given communication material.

SCALABLE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN TEMPLATE

Use this template to help plan your next communications activity. Additionally, keep your first thoughts at a high level; you can always add the necessary information later as needed. The first template is filled out using a COVID-19 relevant example. A blank version appears below with instructions on how to fill it out.

Situation or Issue	Date	
COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy and Uptake	Date, Time, and Location of Meeting	June 2022
	Amendments	
Situation Overview <p>ISANS is working with a community in the city of Dartmouth where health partners have shown high vaccine hesitancy and lack of vaccine uptake.</p> <p>The community includes several recent immigrant arrivals who have low literacy in both English and their primary language. Local health authorities do not have the resources or materials in the necessary formats.</p> <p>The local health authority plan to run a mobile vaccine clinic in the community and would like support getting individuals out to get vaccinated. They have had poor turn out with their past vaccine clinic in this community and will stop offering mobile vaccination clinic services to this community if uptake of the next mobile vaccination clinic is poor.</p>		
Importance of Response to the Organization		
Low	Medium	High
Headline Facts <p>Local health authorities plan to run a vaccine clinic in a Dartmouth community that is experiencing high vaccine hesitancy. The community includes several recently arrived immigrants who have low literacy and will require aid to access the mobile vaccine clinic</p>		
Unconfirmed Information <p>Do recent arrivals have COVID-19 vaccine that need to be recognized or have they not received any vaccine at all?</p> <p>What is driving the hesitancy amongst in the immigrants within the community?</p> <p>What questions do the immigrant community have about COVID-19 or the vaccine?</p> <p>How many people we expect to attend the vaccine clinic?</p>		

Objectives

- » Inform community residents about COVID-19 and the importance of vaccination.
- » Inform immigrants within the targeted community about the vaccine clinic

Key Messages

- » **Vaccines are an important line of defense in our collective fight against COVID-19**
 - Each vaccine helps reduce severe illness and hospitalizations from COVID-19. After two doses, both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines offer similar levels of protection from COVID-19.
 - By getting vaccinated, you are protecting yourself, your family and community from COVID-19.
- » **Vaccines are safe and free**
 - The COVID-19 vaccines are safe to use. This is based on rigorous testing. Health Canada continues to watch vaccine rollout in Canada and will adjust the use of vaccines, as necessary.
 - Vaccines will be available to every Nova Scotian who wants one, including those without a Nova Scotia Health (MSI) card or permanent residence.
- » **Mobile Clinics are an important and safe way to access healthcare**
 - Mobile clinics offer a safe and convenient alternative to access important healthcare, such as vaccinations, in your home community.
 - Mobile health clinics have both nurses and doctors available to supply healthcare and respond to questions you might have about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines

Audience

- » **Who:** Our primary audience is newly arrived immigrants who live in the community and have worked with ISANS staff in the past
- » **What:** They are motivated by their ongoing settlement journey in Nova Scotia
- » **Where:** The immigrants live in the community that the clinic will be taking place, but these individuals are a small part of their community in the overall HRM region. Many community leaders live elsewhere than the community the vaccine clinic will be taking place.
- » **When:** The clinic will be taking place in three weeks
- » **Why:** Many of the immigrants do not have their vaccine. Due to strict access restrictions based on an individual's vaccine status, many of these immigrants will not be able to access services if they are not vaccinated.
- » **How:** We will seek to reach out to clients via interpreters through 1:1 calls and simplified vaccine clinic posters that include core information needed to attend the vaccine clinic.
- » **Shared Value:** The importance of family is crucial within this community. The importance of supporting and protecting family is a critical and core value that could be used to promote the importance and need for vaccination.

External	Internal	External/Internal
Non-Organizational Engaged Newcomers	Organizationally Engaged Newcomers	Pre-Arrival Immigrants
Government Policy Makers	Organizational Staff	
Funders	Organizational Volunteers	
Media	Board of Directors	Partners
Community Members	Key Supporters	
Tools <ul style="list-style-type: none">» Creation of speaking script for interpreters and community leaders to share key information about the vaccination clinic» Simplified poster with key vaccination information» Simplified poster with vaccination clinic information		
Tactics <ul style="list-style-type: none">» 1:1 phone calls from interpreters to discuss COVID-19 and vaccines with newly arrived immigrants that live in the community.» Posters in the lobbies of each building that immigrants live, and flyers delivered directly to their homes.» Vaccine navigators to help immigrants find the clinic the day of the vaccination campaign.» Community leader sharing message about clinic at local gatherings in advance of the vaccine clinic.» What's App group		
Spokespeople <p>Only senior leadership team members are authorized currently to speak with media about the vaccine clinic. They will be supported by the communication team. They will use key messages specific to this project and be supplied with additional training, as necessary.</p>		



SCALABLE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN TEMPLATE

REFERENCE

Situation or Issue	Date	
	Date, Time, and Location of Meeting	
	Amendments	
Situation Overview <i>This should outline in a few sentences the situation that has taken place.</i>		
Importance of Response to the Organization		
Low	Medium	High
<i>These are the top-level facts about the situation.</i>		
<i>Use this section to organize information that has yet to be confirmed that could affect your overall response.</i>		
Objectives » What do you want to achieve with your communications? » Does the objective relate to the organization and its work? Is it mission critical? » What does the objective say about who I am going to want to reach?		
Key Messages » Try to write out three key messages » Link back to the mission/vision of the organization. It helps reinforce your ‘brand’ and illustrate why you have an essential voice on the issue. » Use stats and anecdotes...but not too many. One or two stats can help bring life to a story and create an impact. Anymore, you risk confusing your audience or, even worse, yourself when trying to tell your story.		



Audience

- » Answer the 5 w's about your audience:
 - Who (who are they, profession, relationship with subject);
 - What (motivations);
 - Where (where is this audience found, social media, newspapers, letters);
 - When (is there a special time hook that is important)
 - Why (why should they care, what is in it for them); and
 - How (what tools and tactics are you going to use)?
- » Look for shared values with your audience
 - What do you and your audience have in common? Think of ideas of family, children, and community beyond complex concepts of morality and ethics.
- » Be specific, do not be broad. The more specific you can be with who your audience is, the more reflective you can be in your messaging and conscious with your limited time and budget.

External	Internal	External/Internal
Non-Organizational Engaged Newcomers	Organizationally Engaged Newcomers	Pre-Arrival Immigrants
Government Policy Makers	Organizational Staff	
Funders	Organizational Volunteers	
Media	Board of Directors	Partners
Community Members	Key Supporters	

Tools

- » Think first about what you have and could use as is or with some simple adaption. The more you reuse material, the more it helps reinforce your overall message, and creates consistency and brand.
- » Look for evergreen content. This type of content is long lasting, does not have a specific time limit attached to it where it may become irrelevant. This also helps build a pool of content that can be added to into the future and used as needed.
- » Think small and simple. What is in your ability to achieve and do it really, really, well.

Tactics

- » Again, think small and simple. What is in your ability to achieve and do it really, really, well?
- » What tactics do you control, such as websites and social media platforms, and which ones you do not, such as Op-Eds. Make sure you have a mix of tactics to invest your time wisely and get maximum coverage.
- » Pick one tactic that focuses on your audience specifically and one for your key supporters. They are going to need different messages and will be reached differently. Do not treat them as one in the same and expect results.

Spokespeople

Who are the approved spokespeople for this situation? Are they different than the standard spokespeople? If so, what type of support/training might they need?

[Link to blank template](#)

LEARNING

Introduction

For some organizations, there is a chance to offer more in-depth classroom learning on a subject such as COVID-19. Supporting learning opportunities can ensure organizations provide individuals with literacy obstacles with a supportive environment that will explore a topic with greater detail.

An organization does not need to create a whole new course to support this more detailed learning. Adapting and integrating this new content as part of existing opportunities is a cost-efficient and time-effective approach that keeps learners’ needs at the front.

This section will explore best practices in terms of supporting course content development, ensuring that it still is relevant as a health issue evolves, and how to deliver content to a multilingual group of learners.

Focus on themes vs. situations

At the advent of the pandemic, ISANS focused on creating a specific set of COVID-19 learning modules. These modules would expand as current information became available and the pandemic entered new phases, such as the drive for vaccinations.

While this approach was the best route at first, it became much more difficult to sustain as changes in information became a near-constant presence. This approach did not create a sustainable ‘evergreen’ pool of content that could be used in other health situations.

To alleviate this, ISANS pivoted to discussing COVID-19 information as part of the larger thematic space of health. This change enabled an approach to teaching and learning that supported marginalized communities understanding of larger health-related thematic issues, such as how diseases are transmitted, vaccines, and good hygiene practices.

Through this approach, learners understand more significant thematic concepts that underpin health-related issues that teachers can contextualize with current issues, such as COVID-19. Additionally, learners were instructed on how to navigate the health system writ large—who to call, give personal information, make appointments, write appointments on a calendar, and read appointment times and dates. This focus on health also supplies a basis for the

perennial support of ongoing health initiatives, such as vaccination campaigns for infectious diseases or good hygiene practices for cold and flu season.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » Focus on teaching issues related to health situations, such as COVID-19, through larger themes, such as general health and navigating appointments. This focus on larger health themes helps reinforce important health information, which teachers can contextualize based on current issues like COVID-19.
- » Develop evergreen content that can be adapted to specific health issues or situations. Examples of this evergreen content include general vaccine information to be contextualized based on the disease or infection being discussed, such as COVID-19
- » Create generalized content about navigating the Canadian healthcare system and separate focused modules dealing with specific health emergencies such as Covid-19.
- » Avoid creating time-sensitive information that may quickly become out of date when information changes. Depending on the content, this information might be challenging to adapt and be reused for other health-related topics.

Adaptability of materials

The rapid change of both the virus and the public health information surrounding COVID-19 made adapting materials a common necessity.

The ability to adapt materials efficiently and effectively begins before the work starts and touches on the preceding three sections explored: writing, design, and planning. Adapting materials often creates a domino effect that can have wide-ranging implications. Creating a plan for how your organization will make these adaptations is essential. Planning includes who needs to be involved, the types of materials that need to be adapted, new translations that may be needed, and how this new information will be approved and distributed.

You can make adapting materials easier by setting the necessary processes in place, recognizing what is in your organization’s ability to adapt materials, and designating a person to oversee, implement, and communicate the changes.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » Create common assets and materials wherever possible. Some programs enable linked assets like images to update automatically when changes are made to the files. This makes updating changes easier to undertake and more consistent.
- » Avoid creating assets such as videos or difficult-to-replicate animations for health issues that may require new information and frequent updates, such as COVID-19.
 - Implementing changes to a video can be costly, requiring new voiceover work or reshooting depending on the new information that needs to be shared.
 - Animated icons or custom designs could be more challenging to update since it requires a specialized skillset than more commonly used simple vector-based designs that most designers can work with.
- » Focus on replicable approaches to design that emphasis simplicity. When possible, use user-friendly programs, such as Canva, PowerPoint, or Google Slide that enable a wider range of individuals to implement changes, as necessary.
- » Instead of including information that may change regularly directly in your materials, link some of your content to trusted 3rd party resources. These organizations must update these materials when new information becomes available. Examples of this include Public Health or local health authorities.

Working with language groups for special learning sessions

When working with marginalized communities or literacy individuals with complex topics, such as health information, it is sometimes best to instruct or provide a forum in the student's primary language. This will take more resources and planning in cases like ISANS, with individuals coming from different language groups.

Using an individual's primary language, orally vs. a written format, enables individuals who may face literacy challenges in their primary language to engage effectively. During these sessions, having an expert, such as a doctor or public health official present, enables individuals to ask their questions directly in a manner they may not otherwise be able to do.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- » Focus on one language group at a time. For example, if you have five languages in total, you will need five different sessions (one for each language). Use only one interpreter and language per call.
- » If you use Zoom, try avoiding breakout groups and keep participants together in one large meeting room. This approach ensures that people who might have the same question can hear the response together.
- » Ensure interpreters understand the topic and are proficient in discussing the health issue, such as COVID-19, in the language they are interpreting in. Interpreters that lack context or training on a particular subject may struggle to find the right word or phrase when interpreting. Offer training and opportunities to these interpreters prior to the session you plan to host.
- » Use experts, such as nurses, doctors, and public health experts, to support your presentation. The translator or interpreter can help support the message shared with those in attendance and those in attendance asking their questions.

Building an Image Bank for literacy learning and teaching

For those providing language services for literacy learners, visual and narrative explanation is most effective. A worthwhile investment would be a bank of step-by-step photographic or illustrated images of healthcare processes, working in collaboration with language services staff for identification of most useful processes.

Language services staff and staff in other departments at ISANS found a need for a bank of images to create narrative informational materials. Without having access to these materials, staff often had to go out and take pictures themselves, adding extra time to their workload. Leveraging existing relationships with photographers, or relying on the Communications department, this bank of images or illustrations could be built or bought to show a host of healthcare processes. Language instructors could provide a starting 'list' of images.

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Annex

WRITING STYLE GUIDES

Organization

- » Organize your text logically by topic or idea
- » Avoid putting a series of important but unconnected sentences together
- » Build separate paragraphs or make a list of “other considerations”
- » Write instructions in the order carried out
- » Use titles and subtitles to break up text, i.e.:
 - Introduction
 - Project goals
 - Project implementation
 - Project challenges
 - Project successes
 - Summary

Use bullets and numbered lists to

- » Break up blocks of text into more easily read chunks
- » Help you stay organized and emphasize information
- » Show your ideas are connected
- » Show ideas are of equal value



Write in plain language

Your readers should easily:

- » Find the information they expected to read
- » Understand what they read the first time they read it
- » Use what they read
- » Avoid using idioms or popular expressions

Use short sentences to

- » Eliminate unnecessary words
- » Remove redundancies
- » Use strong verbs
- » Force the subject (a person or thing) to be the focus of the sentence

Avoid negative language

- » Negatives are difficult to read
- » We want to set firm conditions using positive language

Use pronouns for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person

- » Use *we*, *us*, *our*, to show the perspective or opinion of ISANS
- » Use *you*, *your*, *yourself*, *yourselves* to communicate what you want the reader to do or understand
- » Use *he*, *him*, *his*, *himself*, *she*, *her*, *hers*, *herself*, *it*, *its*, *itself*, *they*, *them*, *their*, *theirs*, and *themselves* to communicate the view or opinion of the person(s) being written about

Use the correct tense

- » For ongoing activities, use the present tense
- » For finished activities, use the past tense
- » For future activities, use the future tense

Write in active voice to

- » Make it clear a subject (a person or thing) handles the action that takes place in a sentence
- » Avoid helper verbs (to do, to be, and to have)
- » Avoid phrases with “by”
- » Avoid “-ing” words

Miscellaneous

- » Avoid using etc. and instead start with, “including” or “for example”
- » Use e.g., for listing examples (e.g., apples, bananas, and pears)
- » Note, i.e., means, “in other words”

