

Getting Your Message Out

How thinking like a marketer can lead to more effective early childhood communications



Michael Medwick

Senior Communications Associate
First Five Nebraska

MMedwick@firstfivenebraska.org
FirstFiveNebraska.org



Kelly Medwick

Chief Business Development Officer
Firespring

Kelly.Medwick@firespring.com
Firespring.com/nonprofit

Communications that create change

We get it. You're excited about what a stronger early childhood infrastructure can do for your community. Time to roll up your sleeves and start getting the word out!

But building your community's commitment to quality early care and learning takes more than just sharing information. Your communications need a coordinated strategy and structure that doesn't stop at creating awareness, but moves your audiences toward action.

That's the essence of marketing.

Elements of a marketing strategy

- Identify your issue(s)**
- Know your role in the conversation**
- Understand your audience**
- Move your audience from awareness to engagement to action**
- Measure your success and fine-tune your strategy**

The right message to the right people using the right methods at the right time results in behavior change

Getting Your Message Out: Effective Early Childhood Communications

1 Identify your issue(s)

There's any number of good and compelling reasons why we should promote the importance and value of quality early care and learning opportunities. But your communications efforts are more likely to get traction if they address specific issues and challenges affecting your community. Be clear and specific about these issues—it'll help you set measurable goals and identify strategies to meet them.

Examples: Our community is losing more young families than it attracts—we have to reverse that trend. More child care providers in our community need to see the value in becoming licensed, as well as growing the quality of their programs. We need to connect local providers with more resources to help them stay in business.

2 Know your role in the conversation

The effectiveness of any communications strategy doesn't only depend on the nature and content of your message—it's also affected by the messenger. Think about how you and/or your organization are perceived in the community and how that may affect the way your message resonates. What do you offer that makes you a credible advocate for your issue? Is your brand and voice a good match for the audiences you may want to engage?

3 Understand your audience

Who is the most important audience you need to engage? If your answer is *everybody*, you'll need to narrow it down if you're going to use your time and resources strategically and get measurable results from your communications efforts.

Who are your priority audiences and what, specifically, do you want them to do?

What are their civic, social or political values? Where you think they currently stand on your issue?

What are their most significant anxieties or goals?

Where do they get their information? Who do they trust or listen to?

What message is most likely to resonate with this audience based on what you know about them?

Getting Your Message Out: Effective Early Childhood Communications

4 Developing a plan and putting it into action

Based on your understanding of your issue, objective and audience(s), it's time to develop a SMART communications plan.
(SPECIFIC | MEASURABLE | ACHIEVABLE | RELEVANT | TIME-BOUND)

	We will do this	To engage this audience	Using these tools/ channels	To achieve this result	By this time
Awareness					
Engagement					
Action					

5 Measure your success

Your success in messaging about your issue will be defined by the goals and outcomes you identified during the planning process. The more specific these are, the easier it will be to determine what worked, what didn't and why.

Did your message gain exposure?

Who picked up on your message and propagated it? Was it shared on social media? Was it covered in local broadcast media?

What was the quality of engagement?

What evidence do you have that your messaging generated conversation or substantial feedback in the audiences you targeted?

Did your communications deliver the intended end result?

Were your engagement efforts successful in obtaining funds or resources for your local EC project? Did your local legislator or elected officials take the policy action you were aiming for?

Did you encounter pushback?

Where were your messaging efforts less successful? What were the key arguments or criticisms you heard? What might have undercut your efforts to build interest and support?
