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# Communication Format Guidelines

In Chapter 1, you learned that a key component of effective communication is knowing your audience and method of delivery so that you can create content and a format that is appropriate and valuable.

**Directions:** Consider the following guidelines when formatting your communication for a variety of different messaging formats.

## Guidelines for Formatting Your Message

| Message Format | Guidelines | Suggested Content Ideas |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Hard Copy | | |
| Letters home | * Share important information or updates. * Maintain a focus and be specific—usually letters home are designed to let people know about one important topic. * Always include the date and a signature at the end. * Provide contact information in case people have follow-up questions. | * Beginning-of-year planning * Upcoming events * Emergency closing * Change in program schedule * Enrollment in new activities * End-of-year planning |
| Newsletter | * Involve young people with design, writing content, and distribution. * Have multiple sections for different content but try to keep those sections the same every time you send one out. * Keep the information in each section short, sweet, and varied. * Share pictures of different program activities. | * Program updates * Upcoming special events * Review of past events * Special topics based on what young people learned during programming |
| Flyers and brochures | * Keep the message(s) short and to the point. * Make it colorful and include one or two high-resolution pictures. * Post or share in public places. | * Program enrollment * Special events * Fundraising |
|  |  |  |
| Electronic | | |
| Online newsletter | * Involve young people with design, writing content, and distribution. * Have multiple sections for different content but try to keep those sections the same every time you send one out. Keep the sections short and sweet. * Hyperlink to different organizations’ websites if you mention them. * Always provide an option to unsubscribe or reduce the frequency of messages. | * Program updates * Upcoming special events * Review of past events * Special topics based on what young people learned during programming |
| Email blast | * Always include a full and informative subject line. “Program Name – Calendar of Upcoming Events” is more likely to get someone’s attention than “Program Events.” * Keep the language formal even though we often communicate in a more relaxed tone over personal email. Always start with “Dear,” “Hello,” or “To,” and end with “Sincerely,” “Best,” or “Regards.” * Include a signature at the end of all emails that has important contact information such as your name, email address, and phone number. | * Beginning-of-year planning * Upcoming events * Emergency closing * Change in program schedule * Enrollment in new activities * End-of-year planning |
| Facebook | * Share “exclusive information” in addition to basic updates. Use social media as a platform for unique information that you can’t find on your website or in a newsletter. * Post frequently if you have updates to share. * Make sure that what you post is relevant and useful for your program and the field you are in. * Use engaging and high-quality photos when you post but make sure you have permission first, especially if they are of young people. * If you have a website, use links in your posts that will drive people to that page. | * Non-urgent program updates * Short, funny stories and anecdotes * Photos of youth enjoying the program * Reminders of upcoming events * Questions or things to think about |
| Twitter | * Your message cannot be longer than 140 characters, so be concise. * Tweet what is relevant and useful for your program and the field you are in. * Tweet often—at least once a day—as long as you have something relevant to share. * Use shorter hyperlinks if you want to share. Many sites (like <http://tinyurl.com>) can shorten longer hyperlinks for free. * Encourage dialogue. Ask questions when you tweet, and encourage other Twitter users to retweet your posts. * Use #hashtags to identify posts about a specific topic. Make one up for your program and encourage others to join the conversation. * Add a link to your Twitter feed in your program’s email and on your website. Twitter provides these tools for free through the site. | * Non-urgent program updates * Photos of youth enjoying the program * Reminders of upcoming events * Questions or things to think about * Responses to others about topics that are relevant to your program and the afterschool and expanded learning field more broadly |