

# Health Happens in Libraries Communications Guide



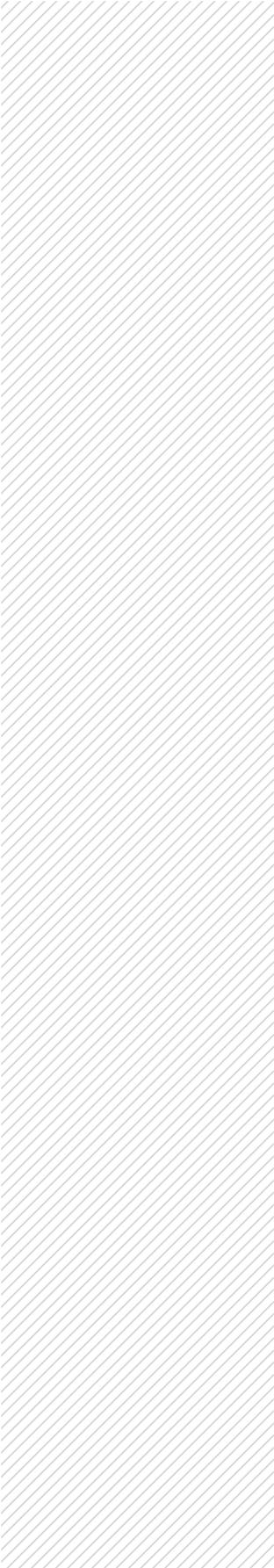
**Health Happens  
In Libraries**

This project is made possible by the  
Institute of Museum and Library Services.



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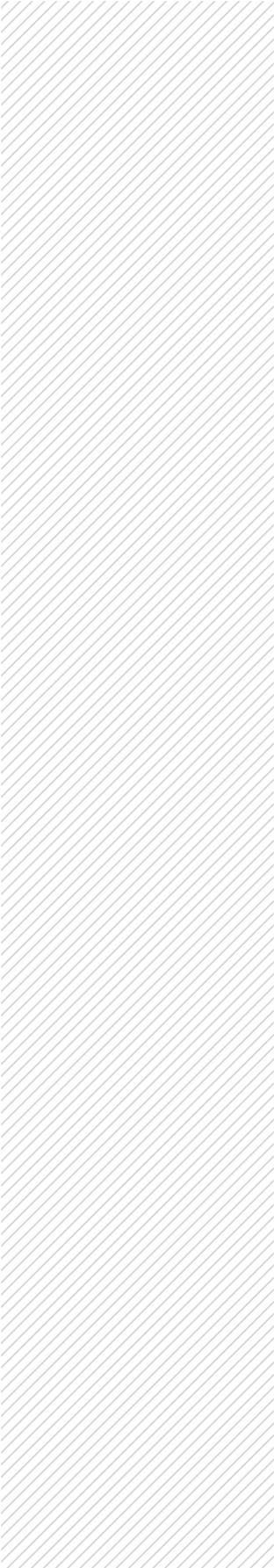


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# INTRODUCTION

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Public libraries are powerful contributors to the health and vitality of the communities they serve. As trusted neighborhood institutions, libraries across the United States continue to evolve to address the changing needs of their patrons and the neighborhoods where they operate. Today, public libraries are finding new and innovative ways to provide resources to communities.

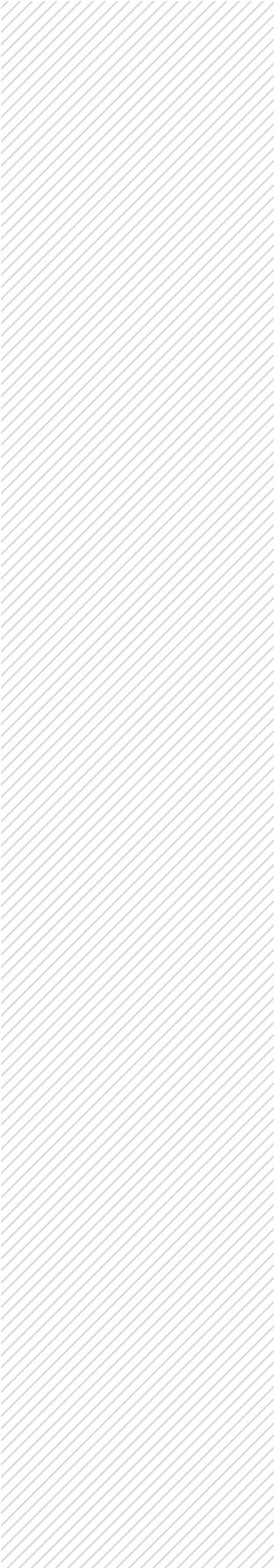
[Health Happens in Libraries](#) is a program run in partnership between OCLC and ZeroDivide, and is funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The program supports the role of libraries as direct contributors to community health, a broad term that encompasses everything from providing health outreach and education services, to improving health literacy, to advancing measurable gains in public health priorities.

This guide is designed for public library staff to use as they consider their own contributions to community health efforts and seek to engage target audiences in their work.



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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The guide will help you to 1) develop messages for your key stakeholder audiences; and 2) consider the communication strategies that will work best for your library and community.

If you have not yet developed priorities for community health engagement activities at your library that can be furthered through intentional communications, please refer to the following Health Happens in Libraries Pathways as a starting point:

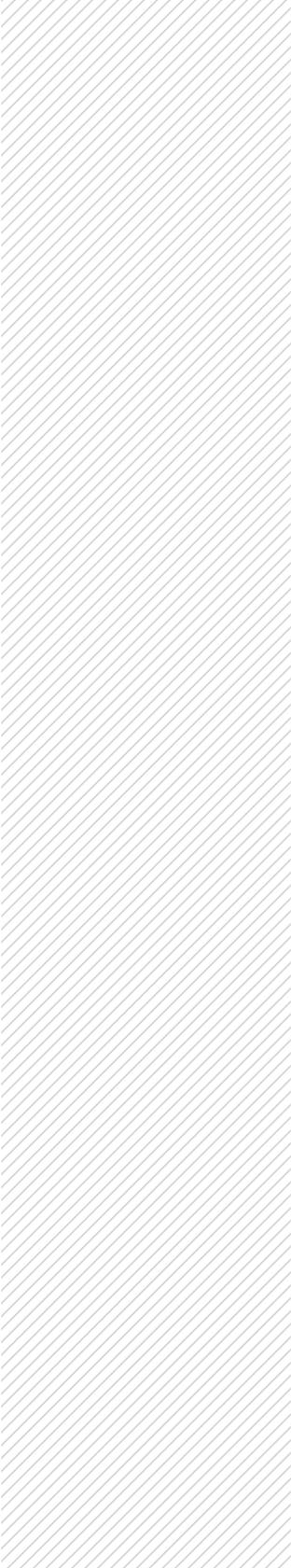
- ♥ [Supporting Healthy Communities through Health Information and Services](#)
- ♥ [Understanding Ethics and Privacy in Health Information and Services](#)
- ♥ [Developing Health Literacy through Health Information and Services](#).

Strategies and recommendations included in this guide can be further supplemented through the use of branded materials. The Health Happens in Libraries brand imagery is available for broad usage by libraries for community health efforts. Please refer to the Health Happens in Libraries [Style Guide](#) for branded imagery and use guidelines.



# UNDERSTANDING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCES

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Before developing the key messages around your library’s health information and services, you must first understand your target audiences. Naturally, you might start with a list of who you are trying to reach, but consider also what ultimate change or impact you are seeking—this focus in framing will help you identify exactly who you need to reach, and what they may need to hear. Every stage of development of your community health engagement strategy will benefit from this intentionality.

You may have a range of stakeholders, and your target audiences may vary depending on the nature of the communication and the type of engagement you are providing. For example, your messaging may need to be adapted depending on whether you are seeking to involve library staff from additional branches in your efforts, making the case for collaboration with partner organizations, or trying to encourage library patrons to sign up for an upcoming health-related workshop.

When thinking about your library’s provision of health information and services, consider the target audiences below. Work through the key questions outlined later in the guide to build an engagement strategy that is both responsive and strategic for each of your targeted audiences.

The following target audiences are explored in this guide:

- ♦ **Patrons**
- ♦ **Library staff**
- ♦ **Library board/trustees**
- ♦ **Partners** – Current and Potential
- ♦ **Funders** – Current and Potential

# WHAT KEY MESSAGES CAN DO

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Customized messages will support your library's value to the community, and bring life and clarity to your health engagement efforts. They are the foundation for the variety of talking and writing points that can be used when communicating to your target audiences.

Develop variations on these points that speak to the specifics of your library's mission and your community health engagement efforts, and seek to be consistent in the use of these messages.

Your library's staff, trustees and volunteers become library ambassadors when they share written and spoken communications on behalf of the library.

Remember, regardless of the overarching impact you are seeking, your goal is to build comprehension of the value of community health engagement and the role your library plays in supporting this work. The messages you create can be used to guide the creation of new communications materials and inform your library's outreach across all types of platforms.

Effective key messages will:

- ◆ Appeal to your identified target audiences
- ◆ Clearly convey your library's role in supporting community health and wellness
- ◆ Reinforce the credibility and value of the library as a trusted community institution
- ◆ Position the library as an inclusive and responsive partner for community health outcomes
- ◆ Work across communication vehicles (including traditional printed communication and digital media)
- ◆ Encourage your target audiences to engage with the library on community health priorities.

# KEY MESSAGES FOR ALL AUDIENCES

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♦ **All public organizations are responsible for promoting community health by creating healthy social and physical environments.**

Addressing the social determinants of health improves the well-being of individuals, families and entire communities. Social determinants of health are the conditions of the environments where people live, work and play. These include a wide range of things like the availability of resources to meet daily needs, access to education and job opportunities, access to health care services and public safety, among many others.

♦ **Public libraries everywhere are the perfect partners for community health priorities.**

Regardless of size or staffing, public libraries are trusted community institutions that provide information literacy services, community convening capacity, and multigenerational and multicultural access to relevant and reliable resources.

♦ **As resource centers, libraries can strengthen community health strategies.**

Working intentionally with local partners, libraries can connect patrons to the information and expertise necessary to promote priority health objectives. This mutually beneficial relationship advances both the unique community mission of the library and the health outcome missions of their partners.

♦ **Cross-sector collaboration levels the playing field.**

Not everyone has equal access to health information and services. Partnerships between public libraries and community health stakeholders address these disparities by providing inclusive access to reliable and relevant consumer health resources, information and support. Intentional collaboration and shared understanding of needs and opportunities between community organizations means a stronger, more responsive network to address the well-being of all community members.

♦ **Libraries respond to the evolving needs of their communities.**

Libraries will continue to be relevant and essential to community health by proactively addressing the needs of their communities. Whether this means bridging the digital divide, providing culturally appropriate resources or demonstrating leadership in community dialogues, the long-term success of public libraries relies on their active participation in community development.

# MESSAGE CUSTOMIZATION

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Starting with the key messages above, you can customize your messaging depending on the audience you are speaking with and the nature of your library's community health engagement strategy. You might find some messages to be more relevant than others at different times and with different audiences. For example, in a presentation to library trustees, the idea of promoting library leadership (#5 on the previous page) might resonate more than a message about social determinants of health (#1). The specifics, of course, depend on the composition and perspectives of your trustees.

The key messages for all audiences were developed to be malleable depending on the structure of your library's objectives. In the following sections we'll review examples of how to customize these messages for different audiences and with different communications platforms.

## Talking Points

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Some of the key words and themes below can be used in your messages to reinforce trust in the library as a community partner and resource:

- Supporting healthy communities
- Trusted partner
- Library as a resource center
- Health literacy
- Informed consumer
- Connect with experts/leveraging expertise
- Responding to community needs
- Unbiased access
- Increased library impact and community exposure
- Promoting library leadership
- Responsive programming
- Evolving library role
- Access to information

# AUDIENCE PROFILES

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This section will help you think through some typical audience profiles and will address the following questions for each group:

- ♦ What considerations do you need to keep in mind when communicating with this particular audience?
- ♦ What action are you seeking through your communication with this particular audience?

## Library Patrons

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### Key Considerations

- ♦ *What are the specific health needs present in your local community? For example, does your community experience higher-than-normal instances of heart disease or diabetes? Do you operate in a community with high rates of uninsurance? Are a high percentage of your community's kids eligible for free or reduced-price lunches? Articulate how exactly your library is responding to the evolving needs of your community, using data as a reference point where possible. The [County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#) available from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are accessible and user friendly tools for examining community health data.*
- ♦ *What types of health resources or information are your patrons already asking for or using?*

### Key Messages

Messages for your library patrons should directly reference their involvement in your community health programming. Before you think about deploying your messages, consider first whether or not you have particular patrons in mind for your targeted health information strategy (such as caregivers of children, or senior citizens or English-language learners), and if so, what their unique communication needs may be. Once you have clarified if your patron audience is broad or targeted to a specific group, talk directly to them and help them understand why they should participate and reinforce the view of the library as their trusted resource center. It should be clear in your messages that the library is committed to healthy communities and that health happens everywhere, including at the public library.

### *Recommended Message Use*

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As your primary audience, you'll want to use messages to patrons for the following purposes:

- ♦ Facilitating program/event/activity sign-ups
  - ♦ Promoting resources available at the library and/or through partner organizations
  - ♦ Encouraging dissemination of program information with others (i.e., target one audience for the participation of a secondary audience—for example, target mothers of young kids to encourage participation in a healthy snack program for their children)
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# Library Staff

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Library staff include members of your own team and, potentially, staff at other libraries in your system who may need to be aware of the planned or implemented community health efforts of your library.

## Key Considerations

- ♦ *What health resource expertise do you have on staff? How can your library strengthen current community health strategies?*
- ♦ *What existing workshops or literacy programs does your library already offer that could be customized with a community health focus?*
- ♦ *How does your staff typically like to receive updates about new initiatives or resources, and/or provide feedback to that work?*

## Key Messages

Messages for your fellow library staff (whether in your location or other branches throughout your system) should reinforce their roles as resource and service providers. Not all libraries will have the content expertise on staff for every stated health information service priority or program. However, libraries and their staff members are exceptionally well-equipped to connect patrons to information and experts in their networks through informed referral. This ensures that, regardless of size or staffing, every library can play a role in supporting community health outcomes.

## *Recommended Message Use*

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As a central part of the success of your health information programming, you might find the need to develop messages to support staff in the following ways:

- ♦ Inform about (or seek input regarding) newly launched initiatives
  - ♦ Provide updates on programming
  - ♦ Request program/event/activity coordination
  - ♦ Encourage staff participation or seek staff expertise
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# Library Board/Trustees

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The advisors who influence your library's programmatic and strategic priorities are critical to the success of any community health resource offering. Once they understand the importance of integrating community health within the mission of the library, this work can become a priority outreach strategy.

## Key Considerations

- ♦ *Does your library's board already include any health advocates?*
- ♦ *If your library hasn't already articulated its desired impact for providing health information and services, what concerns or opportunities might your board wish to address for adopting community health as a priority, that you can inform through intentional communication?*

## Key Messages

The trustees of your library are obviously key stakeholders, and they can be the driving force behind your community health information strategies, or conversely a group that needs to understand the importance of supporting health priorities at the library.

Your messaging to them should take their stance into consideration and include themes of leadership and responsiveness. Illustrate how playing an active role in health dialogues positions the library as a community leader. Reinforce that aligning services with community goals is both forward-looking and sustainable.

## *Recommended Message Use*

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Your trustees are in a position to be your biggest advocates to support community health efforts at the library, and it's important to be thoughtful about your messages with this group.

Communications with boards of trustees may often take the following forms:

- ♦ Meeting reports or presentations
  - ♦ Quarterly programmatic updates
  - ♦ Invitations to participate in programs/events/activities
  - ♦ Requests for partner introductions and/or to serve as liaison to pitch or promote program ideas
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# Partners – Current and Potential

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Partners are the myriad institutions and organizations that can be powerful contributors to the success of your library's community health efforts. They are in the position to provide content expertise, distribute information about your library and resources, and/or provide supplemental services and information to your community.

Examples of partners can range from community health service providers, to local medical or nursing universities, to health departments or local news health editors, among countless others.

## Key Considerations

- ♦ *What is the expertise or service that would most enhance the impact of your library's community health engagement strategy? What is the local organization in your community that is in the best position to offer this expertise/service?*
- ♦ *Consider the demographics of your library patron audience—what are the community health centers that serve this audience?*
- ♦ *How do your partnerships ensure inclusive access to reliable and relevant consumer health information for the unique cultural or demographic considerations of the patrons you serve?*

## Key Messages

Regardless of the nature of your partnerships—knowing that both the partner organizations and the structure of the partner relationships can vary widely—your messages to this audience should reference the value of partnering with the public library and the leveraged impact of cross-sector collaborations.

Highlight your library's position as a trusted institution and community convener and showcase your strength as a hub for information and resources. Both of these components are invaluable assets to any partnership.

Whether you are approached by another organization to join a community health effort, or the idea is generated internally, think broadly about the partnerships that can strengthen your efforts. Look beyond the content experts to think about who else would make your library's community health activities more inclusive, wider reaching, more robust or more beneficial to those you serve.

## *Recommended Message Use*

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You may find the need to communicate with your partners at every stage in your collaboration, from generating ideas, through designing or delivering events or programs, to closing or sustaining activities. Some examples include:

- ♦ Pitching a project or service idea to a potential partner
  - ♦ Reporting on the outcomes and evaluation results of an existing partner program
  - ♦ Requesting outreach to a partner's networks to disseminate information about library resources and services
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# Funders – Current and Potential

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Like the partners discussed in the previous section, potential and current funders include the institutions or organizations that can be central to sustaining or growing your library’s community health engagement strategy, particularly if programming is a component of that strategy. Many community foundations or health service provider foundations understand the valuable role the public library system plays as a trusted partner to support their desired community health impacts.

## Key Considerations

- ♦ *What are the stated health-related impacts that local foundations are seeking?*
- ♦ *What technologies or tools could enhance the effectiveness of your community health engagement priorities?*
- ♦ *What case can you make to demonstrate why your library is the perfect partner for community health efforts?*

## Key Messages

Your messaging with current or potential funders should reference the value of partnering with the public library and the leveraged impact of cross-sector collaborations.

This last point is especially relevant when communicating with health funders—make the connection that health happens everywhere in communities, including in libraries. Likewise, if the funder is interested in addressing the health outcomes of a particular demographic, consider the community members most in need of accessible, culturally relevant health resources. In every case, illustrate how the library is a strong and trusted place to provide this information.

With this audience, focus your talking points on the specific community health priorities being addressed through your efforts.

## *Recommended Message Use*

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Depending on the stage of your library’s health information and service efforts, and the nature of your existing relationship with your funders, communications with this audience can take many forms. Some examples include:

- ♦ Project proposals
  - ♦ Mid-term or final reports
  - ♦ Donor communications (for example, quarterly newsletters, appeal letters, annual reports)
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# LIBRARIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Many libraries have selected social media platforms that work best to reach their patrons. Whether you have an integrated social media strategy or are just becoming familiar with resources like Twitter and Instagram, you can use technology to promote your key messages and engage in public dialogue.

## 3 Cs Method

The 3 Cs Method is an easy system to integrate social media for your communications with various audiences.

For any communication effort, consider the 3 Cs of Curation, Creation and Conversation to determine where to focus your social media engagement and develop a high-impact strategy.

♦ **Curation:**

Through tracking resources and filtering information provided by reputable organizations or recognized experts, you can point your audience to meaningful content developed by others. This is a natural role for libraries!

“There is something of interest over there...”

♦ **Creation:**

Promote events/activities/programs and distribute content developed in-house.

“This is our stuff and we think it’s worth your interest...”

Create stories and messages on the health topics your library has determined to be of priority. Ask your followers to promote your content to gain even more impressions (that is, the number of people who see your content whether or not they “Like” it or share it).

♦ **Conversation:**

Engage others in online dialogue about a topic. Ask questions on your platforms and reply to others.

“Join us in dialogue on this interesting topic...”

Best when partnered with another C (either Curation or Creation), engaging in meaningful conversation on relevant health-related topics reinforces your library’s reputation as a trusted source of information.

# Social Media Strategy Recommendations

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## Curation

- ♦ **Tip:** Use social media to promote library resources or materials that support the work of your health information and services. Learn about and use the platform that is most relevant to your audience. Because social media trends evolve quickly, resources such as the [Pew Research Center](#) (Internet, Science & Tech) can help you stay up-to-date and informed of the social media landscape.
- ♦ **Tip:** Leverage your staff's strengths and ask them to promote library resources or materials that support the work of your health information efforts.
- ♦ **Tip:** Find and promote related resources and reports that your library's current or potential funders have developed.
- ♦ **Tip:** Use social media to cross-promote the related efforts happening with your partners. Use your #hashtags like **#libs4health** when tagging others and they will begin to use them as well.
- ♦ **Tip:** To support your library's community health efforts, consider following and promoting messages from local or national health organizations that address similar issues. Examples of national resources that might be relevant to your efforts include:
  - ♦ [www.HealthyPeople.gov](http://www.HealthyPeople.gov)
  - ♦ [www.MedlinePlus.gov](http://www.MedlinePlus.gov)
  - ♦ [www.Healthfinder.gov](http://www.Healthfinder.gov)

## Creation

- ♦ **Tip:** Consistently use #hashtags to tag content you send out on your library's community health activities.
- ♦ **Tip:** Develop content related to your library's efforts and ask your trustees to share via their networks.

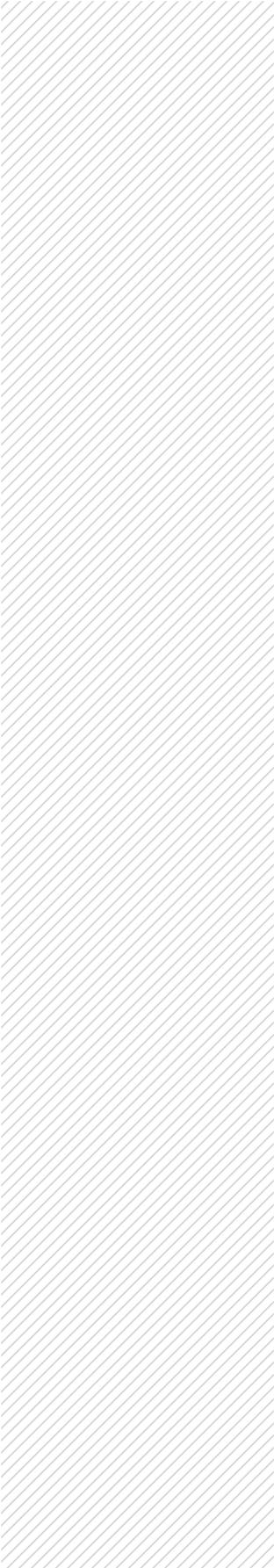
## Conversation

- ♦ **Tip:** Ask staff who oversee various social media platforms to actively seek out online conversations related to your community health priorities. Using your library's social media guidelines, engage others in dialogue to reinforce the perception that health happens in libraries.
- ♦ **Tip:** When appropriate, acknowledge your partners', and trustees' efforts on social media. Directly thank them for their leadership and support of the library's work.
- ♦ **Tip:** Showcase your partnerships by seeking them out via social media and engaging in direct and public dialogue about community health efforts at your library.



# CLOSING

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As you build out your library's community health engagement priorities and develop messaging for custom audiences, remember that communication isn't a one-way conversation. Consider this outreach as a two-way street and an opportunity for community dialogue. Meaningful community service and programming is built through a process that holds the community's voice central to the design and delivery of the work.

Cultivate a culture of feedback and encourage input from your patrons about their experiences or needs regarding community health services and resources. Use your communication channels in creative ways to gather that feedback. By inviting input in a meaningful way, you ensure that your health programming priorities (and related outcomes) align with the needs of the community.

Whether your library has already outlined a community health engagement strategy or is just beginning to think about prioritizing services in this area, an intentional communications strategy will help to ensure that health happens at your library, and in your community.