

District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness

Public Awareness Work Group Overview



Problem Statement

The Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) and its partners do not currently have a forum to collectively develop communications strategies focused on raising public awareness about the causes of homelessness, the strategies being implemented by the District, services and supports that are available, and ways members of the public can get involved. More traditional forms of media (owned, earned, and paid) are commonly used by the District government but have drawbacks, particularly with regard to breadth of reach, message control, and cost; accordingly, they have left the homeless services system vulnerable to losing control of its messaging. Because of its accessibility, social media offers the ICH an important opportunity to take information directly to District residents – but in order to be effective, a more intentional approach is needed. (See *Attachment: Social Media Analysis* for more background.)

Purpose of the Work Group

The Public Awareness Workgroup will serve as a forum for the ICH and its partners to develop and implement strategies to 1) raise public awareness and shift the narrative about homelessness in the District; and 2) help amplify messaging about available programs and services for individuals and families experiencing or at-risk for homelessness. The Public Awareness Workgroup will work to develop a communication plan that includes a social media engagement strategy that is executed in coordination across partners and in concert with the other forms of media currently used.

Goals

- Establish Communication Plan, including key themes and topics to emphasize in the coming months, partners who can help amplify messages, and strategies for increasing our reach (i.e., “planned” messaging);
- Aid other ICH committees and work groups to support their messaging needs regarding upcoming events, available services, programming or policy changes, etc. (“on-demand” messaging).
- Identify and engage stakeholders who are not associated with the ICH but have missions aligned with the ICH or whom otherwise have large networks and are willing to assist with message amplification.
- Develop metrics to measure impact of the group’s efforts to determine if and how the group will move forward in the future

Composition

The Public Awareness Workgroup will be comprised of communications, social media, and public relations professionals from the ICHs partner agencies, and/or others with an interest in this topic.

Roles & Responsibilities

Co-Chairs (2) – responsible for shaping and managing the overall strategies and performance of the workgroup. These responsibilities include setting priorities; facilitating meetings; representing the workgroup at other ICH meetings; and monitoring and adjusting the workgroup’s strategies as needed.

Members – actively participate in meetings by providing updates from their own agency or organization and offering constructive ideas, input and feedback where requested.

Key Deliverables

- **Communication Plan**, to include:
 - Social Media Engagement Strategy to increase social media presence and impact among ICH member agencies and partners to gain engaged followers and market positive storylines via social media (*for more information see Social Media Engagement document*)

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- Stakeholder Engagement Analysis to identify the major players in the District to bring them on as “partners” that can help amplify messaging
- Messaging Protocol for initiating and distributing planned and on-demand messaging
- Identification of Key Topics and Themes to highlight for 2021 (with regard to planned messaging)