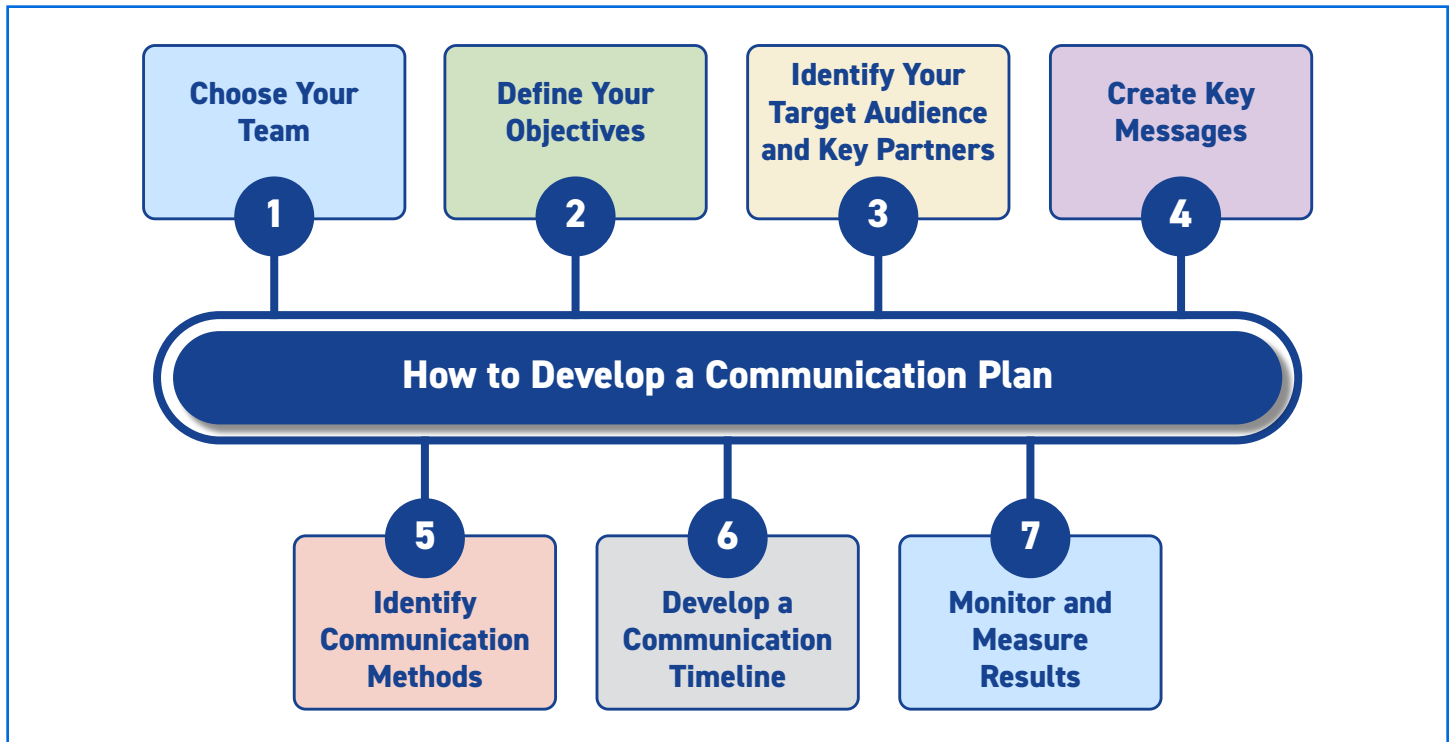


## Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids: A Guide for Developing a Communication Plan

This document will help you develop a Communication Plan to share information about your school or child care facility's involvement in the Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids program. A comprehensive Communication Plan offers a foundation for transparent communication about your participation in the program, results from hazard assessments, and actions taken to address any hazards identified, while establishing trusting relationships with your communities. As shown in **Figure 1**, the seven simple steps for developing an effective Communication Plan are briefly listed.

**Figure 1. Seven Steps for Developing an Effective Communication Plan**



The seven steps are further discussed as follows:

- 1) **Choose your team** to support the development and implementation of the Communication Plan,
- 2) **Define your objectives** for outreach and communication,
- 3) **Identify your target audience and key partners** to ensure that your message is customized to reach everyone in your community,
- 4) **Create key messages** to ensure that you are sharing updates and information about your participation in the program,
- 5) **Identify communication methods** to provide community awareness of key events throughout testing and mitigation for lead and asbestos hazards,
- 6) **Develop a communication timeline** with your target audience before you participate in the program, while you are participating, and after you have taken action following participation, and
- 7) **Monitor and measure results** to track the effectiveness of your communication efforts and adjust your outreach, if necessary.

**These seven steps are further detailed in the remainder of this document.**



## Step 1: Choose Your Team

A well-rounded team with identified roles can help foster effective communication and prompt responses. Your team should include the following: \*The goal of Step 1 is to establish a well-rounded team...\*

- A leader to organize the team,
- A primary contact for questions,
- Someone to lead social media and outreach efforts, and
- Backups for each position.

Developing well-ordered team dynamics will encourage the success of implementing an effective Communication Plan and should not be a one-person job. You can use **Table 1** in the supplemental Communication Plan template ([bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template](https://bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template)) to help organize your team.

Develop a spreadsheet that includes a point of contact for each partner. Collect the full names, phone numbers, and email addresses of each point of contact. It is also important to make a note of the target audience for each partner. Use **Table 2** in the supplemental Communication Plan template ([bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template](https://bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template)).

Now that you have chosen your team, you can move on to Step 2.

This Communication Plan describes assigning roles to at least five communication team members. However, it is possible for one person to develop and implement a Communication Plan for his or her facility.



## Step 2 : Define Your Objectives

The objectives for communicating with your community will guide the creation of your Communication Plan. Some examples of goals for Communication Plans are to:

- Build stakeholder awareness,
- Provide transparency throughout the process,
- Enhance community engagement, and
- Update your community about the proactive steps that your facility is taking to protect and improve children's environmental health.

A more in-depth analysis of how to accomplish these goals is explained in Step 4.

After defining your objectives, you are ready to identify your target audience and key partners in Step 3.



## Step 3: Identify Your Target Audience and Key Partners

You should think about with whom you would like to share communication. Keep in mind that people who will likely be impacted by your participation in this program should be included here. Some examples of groups to target with outreach materials include the following:

- **School or child care facility community:** Staff members, students, and parents or guardians should be informed of program participation, goals, results, and outcomes of your participation in this program.
- **Other facility users:** This community includes people outside of the school or child care facility community who may sporadically use or occupy the building (e.g., local community groups, churches, camps, school board members).

- **Broader community:** This community may consist of residents and local businesses in the school or child care facility's district or town. The media (e.g., local, regional, national) can serve as a conduit for vital information for the broader community. Preparation is key in an effort to generate accurate news releases. The spokesperson or designated team member of the broader community should prepare factual and consistent information and be ready to respond to interview requests.
- **Local community organizations:** Local health officials, such as health officers, environmental health specialists, doctors, and nurses, can assist you and your community in understanding the health risks associated with lead in drinking water, as well as lead-based paint and asbestos in schools and child care facilities. Local environmental community organizations may be able to help you draft communication materials, assist you with sampling, or understand results.
- **Drinking water community:** Public water systems are responsible for complying with all national and state drinking water standards. The public water system that serves your school or child care facility can provide information to the community about the system's efforts to minimize lead in drinking water and would be interested in the results of your water test.

It is important to identify your key partners because this will ensure that you reach your target audience. The key partners can help share your communication materials, spread awareness of the program to others, and effectively inform the local community. For example, media outlets (e.g., local, regional, national) can serve as a conduit for vital information for the broader community. In addition, local community organizations and local health officials, such as health officers, environmental health specialists, doctors, and nurses, can assist you and your community in understanding the health risks associated with lead in drinking water, as well as lead-based paint and asbestos in schools and child care facilities. Environmental community organizations may be able to help you draft communication materials, assist you with sampling, or understand results.

**Note for Working with Media Outlets**  
Preparation is key because you want to generate accurate news releases. The spokesperson or designated team member of the broader community should prepare factual and consistent information and be ready to respond to interview requests.

These partners can be valuable team members and can include, but are not limited to, the following:

• School board members	• Utility or water suppliers
• Civic leaders	• Environmental organizations
• Local public health officials	• Community organizations
• State Drinking Water Program representatives	• Heads of buildings or facility maintenance and custodial services.
• Media (newspapers, radio stations and podcasts, television stations, web, and newswire outlets)	

Develop a spreadsheet that includes a point of contact for each partner. Collect the full name, phone number, and email address of each point of contact. It is also important to make a note of the target audience for each partner. Use **Table 2** in the supplemental Communication Plan template ([bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template](https://bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template)).



## Step 4: Create Key Messages

A key message can clarify your meaning and provide the critical takeaway regarding the issue about which you are communicating. You should develop concise messages about your facility's efforts to protect children's health. Materials should be consistent, focused, and easily understandable. Our communication toolkit ([bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template](https://bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template)) will support the development of these messages. Here are some communication materials that you can use to ensure clear and concise communication:

- Launch a continuous strategy of education and awareness, using varying communication channels,
- Prepare a fact sheet so that your spokesperson has verified information about the status of your plumbing system and program,
- Post information on your official web page, and
- Ensure that your communication materials include the following:
  - A program description with information on how to contact the Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids team if you have any questions;
  - Results of the sampling program and Risk Mitigation Plans;
  - Public health risks and effects caused by lead in drinking water, as well as lead-based paint and asbestos at schools and child care facilities;
  - How families can increase their awareness of potential lead exposure in their homes and elsewhere; and
  - Information from state-certified laboratories, which can test water for lead and other harmful contaminants.



## Step 5: Identify Communication Methods

The methods of public notification may be applied independently or in combination with communication about drinking water, lead-based paint, and asbestos and the meaning of sampling program results. You should:

- Provide an email and phone number to receive communications about the program, and
- Decide where requests for additional information should be directed. Will you create a district web page? Will you direct them to the Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids website?

Multiple platforms should be used to communicate the information. The methods of communication are discussed as follows:

- **Press releases:** This type of release in the local newspaper or on local television and radio stations can reach a broad audience. It is vital that the press release informs readers of how to get sampling results and other information about lead in drinking water.
- **Letters and flyers:** These materials are a direct and effective method of communicating the Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids program activities to parents and guardians and to other members of a school, child care facility, or building community.
- **Staff newsletters:** A notice enclosed in a staff newsletter is another option for directly and effectively communicating information about the Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids program to employees.
- **Presentations:** Providing presentations at schools and during child care-related meetings can also serve as an effective method of communication to groups (e.g., Parent-Teacher Associations [PTAs], faculty, school boards).
- **Email and websites:** Digital communications are highly convenient for parents and guardians. Email provides a quick and easy method for parents to ask questions, but responses must be timely to be effective. Websites can be frequently updated to quickly relay new and updated information.
- **Social media:** Updates of the status of the Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids program and information about regular activities can be provided to the public with ease via official social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram).



## Step 6: Develop a Communication Timeline

A thorough communication timeline will help you identify critical communication opportunities and ensure that you are communicating with your community throughout your participation in the program. Having a relationship that is built on trust through effective communication will establish and maintain strong partnerships between your facility and communities by building trust and highlighting your dedication to reducing lead and asbestos hazards where children learn and play.

North Carolina Rule requirements require results to be displayed on the Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids program public mapper 5 days after you receive them, so **make sure you have a plan in place to communicate results and the schools' next steps before the public can see them.**

Participating in this program can improve the environmental health of children; therefore, disseminating the communication materials in a timely manner is of the highest priority. Efforts of public communication are less challenging if those who are affected are notified in advance of significant issues and events. The following times for communicating to members of the local community are recommended:

- **Before** the program begins,
- **As soon as** the results are available,
- **If or when** corrective measures are decided upon, and
- **If** no corrective measures are appropriate because lead levels are low.

**Table 3** in the supplemental Communication Plan template ([bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template](https://bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template)) can be used to refine your communication timeline.



## Step 7: Monitor and Measure Results

Document public outreach and communication activities because this will help improve your public Communication Plan as it evolves. Some examples of the items that should be documented and recorded are as follows:

- Document successful communication,
- Identify pivot points for future communication, and
- Make changes to your Communication Plan in response to community feedback.

**Table 3** in the supplemental Communication Plan template ([bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template](https://bit.ly/3CK-Comms-Template)) can be used to monitor and record your communication activities.