

Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration Project

Communications Roadmap for RETAIN Awardees

JANUARY 2019

Presented by the RETAIN Technical Assistance Team

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Congratulations on joining the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration Project. Our technical assistance team is excited to support your state team in its efforts to test the impact of early intervention strategies that improve stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) outcomes of individuals who experience a work disability.

Although much of the technical assistance we offer you will apply to the *operations* of your pilot/demonstration project, we also intend to support you in the area of *communications*. To that end, we are pleased to share this *Communications Roadmap for RETAIN Awardees*.

How to Use This Document

“Communications”—defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “a technique for expressing ideas effectively”—encompasses a wide variety of tactics and disciplines, from graphic design to writing, marketing, and public relations. It is what we use to brand an initiative, educate stakeholders, persuade target audiences, and help us meet our program goals. As such, we expect your RETAIN team will implement a number of communications strategies throughout your pilot project.

This document is designed to help you begin to consider how and where to infuse effective marketing and communications into your pilot activities. We suggest you use it as a starting point to begin outlining your communications goals and brainstorming potential tactics you can leverage throughout the lifecycle of your pilot.

This roadmap presents general background on communications strategy, guides you through an audience analysis exercise, and lists some potential ways you might use communications to achieve project success. We recommend that you:

- Study this document,
- Conduct a communications brainstorm with relevant team members, and
- Complete the four action steps within this roadmap in order to develop a planning outline. This outline can ultimately serve as the foundation of a strategic communications plan for your pilot project.

Our technical assistance team looks forward to reviewing your outline and offering any assistance you may need in shaping your plans and activities.

Ready to get started?

Where Communications Can Play a Role

There are numerous places to apply communications strategies and tactics to your pilot activities. As you begin to consider them, it can be helpful to segment your demonstration project into three phases:

- Pilot Formation (i.e., activities associated with forming your initiative and getting it up and running)
- Pilot Implementation (i.e., activities associated with service delivery and working with partners and participants)
- Outcome Promotion (i.e., activities associated with promoting outcomes, successes, and exemplary practices stemming from your pilot)

Determining Communications Goals

Thinking in those terms, what might some of your communications goals be?

Communications goals are exactly that—your goals for communicating. They are the broad reasons why you intend to use communications tools and tactics to share information throughout your program.

Although they sometimes overlap, please note that communications goals are different than *program/business* goals. The former are used to help you achieve the latter.

Below are just a few examples of communications goals from some of the RETAIN teams. Please read through them and consider what *your* team's goals might be.

Sample Communications Goals During Pilot Formation:

- To recruit partners to join your team.
- To recruit individuals with work disabilities to participate in your pilot.
- To educate partners/stakeholders on your approach to service delivery during the pilot.
- To establish a consistent brand for your initiative.

Sample Communications Goals During Pilot Implementation:

- To educate pilot partners and/or participants on SAW/RTW strategies.
- To persuade stakeholders that early intervention is an exemplary practice.

- To raise awareness of your RETAIN demonstration project.
- To position your team organizations as thought leaders in the area of SAW/RTW and the advancement of employment of people with disabilities.

Sample Communications Goals During Outcome Promotion:

- To raise awareness of your RETAIN demonstration project's outcomes and successes.
- To drive the continued adoption of exemplary SAW/RTW practices by key stakeholders following the completion of your pilot.
- To inspire target audiences in your state/community to adopt exemplary SAW/RTW practices.



Action Step 1:

Brainstorm and make a list of communications goals that can help you achieve your program goals.

Identifying Target Audiences

Your communications goals go hand in hand with your *target audiences*—the segments of individuals you intend to reach with your messages and services. You will have a number of these audiences throughout the various stages of your project.

It is important to list your target audiences in your communications plan so that you understand how to tailor your messages, channels, and communications tactics. Examples of target audiences include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Workers with recently acquired musculoskeletal work disabilities
- Workers with chronic health conditions that suffer a new injury or illness or worsening of their pre-existing condition
- Individuals who have applied for workers' compensation
- Individuals with mental health disorders that put them at risk of leaving their job
- Manufacturing and construction industry employers
- Small business owners
- Health care professionals
- SAW/RTW coordinators
- Human resources specialists



Action Step 2:

Make a list of the audiences you wish to target through your communications and outreach.

Audience/Channel Analysis

Once you determine your audiences, it can be helpful to conduct a simple audience analysis. Such exercises can help you create tailored messages that will resonate with your audiences, as well as channels you can use to reach them. Examples of communications channels include everything from specific publications, TV stations, and radio outlets to social media platforms, blogs, and trade association events.

Below is a sample audience analysis chart you can use to strategize ways to reach your target audiences.



Action Step 3:

Following the format of the chart below, perform an analysis of each of your target audience segments.

Target Audience Segment	Message <i>What message do you want to communicate to this audience?</i>	Desired Outcome <i>What do you want this audience to feel and/or do after hearing your message?</i>	Understand Your Audience <i>What more do you need to know about this audience to support your desired outcome?</i>	Channels to Reach This Audience <i>Media that they view/listen to/read; influencers they respect; professional organizations they belong to; events they attend</i>

Starter Ideas and Communication Tactics

Once you know your goals, audiences, messages, and channels, you have the building blocks of a strategic communications plan. Now, it's time to get tactical. Communications tactics are the means through which you will deliver your messages—in other words, specific tools and actions you will use in pursuit of your communications goals.

The RETAIN technical assistance team encourages you to brainstorm and outline a list of communications tactics you might use during the various phases of your demonstration project. Here are just a few examples to inspire you:

Sample Communications Tactics During Pilot Formation:

- Establish a name and visual brand for the pilot.
- Draft and design a recruitment fact sheet or brochure about your project.
- Create and market a website to encourage stakeholders to get involved or deliver program content.
- Send an e-blast to like-minded organizations requesting that they spread your recruitment message.
- Conduct a social media campaign to brand your initiative and support recruitment goals.
- Place advertisements in local media to recruit pilot participants.
- Conduct a survey of key stakeholders to inform pilot implementation.

Sample Communications Tactics During Pilot Implementation:

- Draft, design, and distribute backgrounders, toolkits, and other educational materials designed to advance exemplary SAW/RTW strategies.
- Design and promote an infographic illustrating survey results or compelling statistics about SAW/RTW.
- Develop and distribute an online or Web-based training module for health care professionals and/or insurers.
- Create a SAW/RTW training module for American Job Centers to present to clients.
- Create, design, and deliver trainings for RTW coordinators.
- Conduct a social media campaign to raise awareness about program activities.

Sample Communications Tactics During Outcome Promotion:

- Package human interest stories about pilot successes and pitch them to local media.
- Produce a video or PSA profiling pilot success stories and use it to educate target audiences about exemplary practices.
- Send an e-blast to intermediary organizations requesting that they promote educational tools developed through your pilot.
- Promote pilot materials/educational tools via traditional and social media.
- Secure media interviews and speaking opportunities for pilot spokespeople to report results and key findings.



Action Step 4:

Conduct a team brainstorm and create a list of communications tactics you intend to pursue through your demonstration project.

Pulling It All Together

After you've completed Action Steps 1 through 4, you'll have the building blocks of a strategic communications plan for your project. The RETAIN technical assistance team encourages you to put these components on paper and share them with our team for review and future discussions.

Ultimately, your outline can be fleshed out into a detailed plan with more specific strategies and tactics, timelines, and measures of success.

We look forward to working with you and identifying areas where we can be of assistance.

Questions About This Roadmap? Please contact Greta Menard at 202-423-7101 or gmenard@conceptcommunications.com, or Ann Outlaw at RETAINTA@air.org.



This document was prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy and Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) state grantees, by the American Institutes for Research under DOL Contract Number 1605DC-18-F-00429. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of same by the U.S. Government.