COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN FEEDBACK REPORT

Executive Summary

In an effort to guide CLIC communications strategies, CLIC created and distributed an online survey to elicit feedback from CTSA Program hub communicators about what they’re doing to promote their hub’s news and messages, and what challenges they’re facing.

Questions addressed what tactics hub communicators currently employ and what they find successful, what challenges they regularly come across, and what resources would be beneficial for them to have.

The survey was sent via email to the CTSA Program Communications Listserv, with responses collected via REDCap. There were a total of 58 responses from 52 unique hubs (out of 64 total hubs under current funding and no-cost extension) for a final response rate of approximately 81%.

In general, the hub communicators are open to and eager about receiving additional communications support from CLIC. Nearly all of the respondents said they are facing challenges in their roles, and many of them have not yet been able to identify solutions for these challenges. Common challenges across the board deal with internal institutional or hub barriers, a lack of time and resources, and communicating about a complex subject matter.

This report summarizes survey results for quantifiable items, and outlines common themes and specific recommendations gleaned from open-ended responses. This report also offers specific solutions and next steps based on the feedback gathered from the scan.

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Quantifiable Data

**Question: What percentage of your role is dedicated to communicating about the CTSA Program/your hub?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>~50%</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>~25%</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>10</td>
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Most CTSA Program hub communicators dedicate 50% or less of their time to CTSA Program communications.

**Question: Have you faced challenges while trying to effectively communicate about your CTSA Program hub?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50</td>
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Nearly all CTSA Program communicators have faced challenges while trying to communicate effectively about their hub.
Question: How interested are you in the following communications tactics:

A CLIC-specific email newsletter (could include CLIC articles, CLIC site updates, links to news from the network and translational science/research related content)

- Not interested: 2
- Somewhat interested: 28
- Very interested: 28

Most CTSA Program communicators are either somewhat interested or very interested in the proposed CLIC communications tactics.

A moderated forum on the CLIC site (for CTSA Program communications contacts to ask questions and discuss best practices, effective methods, etc.)

- Not interested: 7
- Somewhat interested: 18
- Very interested: 32
Opportunities for collaboration, such as communications-related workshops or meetings

Question: What resources do you use, how often, and how effective do you find them?

HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE THE FOLLOWING?

Print Publications Presentations Videos Blogs Twitter Content Facebook Content News Releases Newsletter

Most hub communicators are not utilizing videos, Facebook or blogs. Many use newsletters and Twitter content on a regular basis to communicate.
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Qualitative Data – Common Themes

**Question: What challenges have you faced while communicating for your CTSA Program hub?**

Newsletters, presentations, print publications and news releases are seen as relatively effective by many hub communicators. It appears that social content isn’t seen as effective as we might have thought.
Themes:

- **Dealing with internal institutional barriers and/or barriers within the hub’s multiple institutions**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “Having a CTSA hub with multiple partner universities is extremely difficult to communicate about when I'm technically an employee of one university (with other responsibilities to that university) but also am responsible for 'agnostic' CTSA communications that sometimes have competing missions (brand/marketing wise - not institution wise). It can be very political.”
    - “Our University has very restrictive rules about how to communicate on campus and branding off campus. We struggle to get our unique message out to the community and to find the meat in the story that relates not just to the science of the investigator, but also to how the CTSA program is making a difference.”
    - “Breaking down internal silos. It seems that many faculty do not care what is happening within other health science colleges on campus. As such, a story featuring an investigator from Medicine that highlights a specific service offering may be overlooked or dismissed by a faculty member in Nursing. Explaining relevancy across a range of disciplines continues to be a challenge.”

- **A lack of time and/or resources**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “My position as the communicator for our Hub is only part time. And within my position, I have other responsibilities beyond just communicating. So my primary challenge is lack of time and people resources—and being a one woman show.”
    - “As a one-person communications operation, it can be challenging to juggle many and various projects. I enjoy the challenge, but wish I had more time for training and research about new ways to communicate or about enhancing some of the ways we already communicate (i.e. social media). One note: I enjoy the quarterly CTSA communications meetings and find them beneficial.”
    - “The biggest challenge is time. As the only communications person I am responsible for producing all of our communications internally and externally as mentioned above. This includes the development and facilitation of marketing materials as well as face-to-face communications to promote our research participant registry, and social media participant recruitment services to researchers.”

- **Communicating about a complex subject matter**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “What we do is wonky and not always the easiest to explain. A lot of what we do involves alphabet soup acronyms that are very confusing.”
    - “Our mission can be hard for people to grasp; for instance, the word 'translational' is not well understood. Even less well understood is the difference between translational science and translational research. It can be hard to draw a bright line (or even a dotted line) between scientific discoveries and CCTS support. It can be challenging to connect with target audiences (we are fortunate to have many CCTS champions who help us promote). Reaching target Partner audiences remains a heavy lift. We need more content developers on staff to help get the word out on our many trainings, funding opps, news and to allow me time to follow up with researchers and trainees who use..."
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our supports and land a grant, publish an article, find a collaborator, launch a trial, etc. to request interviews and help promote their achievements.”

- **Identifying and reaching the appropriate target audiences**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “Finding our target audience without overburdening the community. We are finding that people are overwhelmed with the amount of communication in their mailboxes.”
    - “We struggle with getting targeted list in order to really tailor our content to specific audiences. Most of the time we end up blanketing the whole research community with all of our messages.”

- **A lack of communication and/or clarity from NCATS**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “It was sometimes difficult receiving a response about submitted stories from NCATS staff without repeated follow-up.”
    - “Our early experiences with sending stories to NCATS were that while we got a receipt acknowledgment, we didn't hear back from them for extended periods of time about the results of their internal review process. In one case, where they asked for more information, we never heard back about the results of our updated submission.”

- **A lack of awareness and/or recognition**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “Many don't understand what we do or who we are. Our website is extremely out of date, making it difficult to showcase who we are. Faculty are not proactive in sharing their stories.”
    - “Always an issue is raising awareness about the Center and what we do. Many people are aware of our CTSA but many people have never heard of it.”

**Question: How did you overcome those challenges?**
Themes:

- **Working directly with internal stakeholders**
  
  Supporting quotes:
  
  - “Try to do as much as possible ourselves; link with other departments/institutes within the institution/partners to share information/publications.”
  - “Seek out communicator groups on campus to network and find what others are doing.”
  - “Personally speak with the associate dean for communications and marketing.”

- **Adding external and/or additional resources**
  
  Supporting quotes:
  
  - “We are still looking for effective solutions. For recruitment to our KL2 Clinical Scholars Program, we use a company that maintains the memberships list for the Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine and the cost is very reasonable.”
  - “We have adopted a new social media management software that makes it much easier to plan and post fresh content daily - and to share content with other social media accounts across the university. We have also paid to boost our Facebook page and certain posts in the past, which helped garner new followers. We are currently developing a new set of guidelines for our newsletter to ensure we are providing relevant, necessary, and engaging content to our target audience.”
  - “I am considering hiring student workers to help me implement social media on behalf of our hub.”

- **Generating lots of content in lots of different places**
  
  Supporting quotes:
  
  - “Newsletters, events, emails, presentations to faculty meetings and student groups. Lots of pounding the pavement.”
  - “Kept plugging away at it, getting news and announcements (communications overall) about us, what we are doing into or onto as many places, postings, lists that we can. A broad sweep so to speak.”
  - “Trying to overcome by getting the word out more through social media, website, presenting at faculty meetings, and rebranding.”

- **Strategic communications planning**
  
  Supporting quotes:
  
  - “I am in the process of creating a communications plan and relevant policies in an attempt to streamline our communications and provide more consistent messaging throughout our two partner organizations.”
  - “By establishing an editorial calendar to maintain a stream of content for social media, newsletters, and blogs.”

- **Getting right to the point**
  
  Supporting quotes:
  
  - “I try to strip the message down to its bare essentials.”
  - “We try to write our success stories so the lay person can understand the science in a hope to illustrate what clinical & translational research is and how it affects their lives.”
Questions: What communications resources could CLIC provide to help you communicate the importance of the CTSA Program?

How Can CLIC Help?

Themes:

- **Opportunities for cross-hub collaboration and/or idea-sharing**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “I would love some workshops on these sorts of things (how to engage your audience on social media, how to write a newsletter than your audience will actually WANT to read, etc.) from industry experts or others in the CTSA Program who are doing exceptionally well in these areas.”
    - “Ideas and examples of things that have been successful at other locations would be very helpful.”
    - “Regular opportunities to share successful tactics and update hubs on what we are each working on.”

- **Guidelines, templates and resources**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “Communications templates and tips; marketing and outreach to national media.”
    - “Consultations, Sample communication plan/policies, Templates/samples for various types of communications, PRM basics for those who are new to communications, PRM best practices, ideally tailored for healthcare and health-related research.”
    - “Boiler plate or consistent messaging for the lay person on what the CTSA is, what we do/offer, and what Clinical & Translational Science/Research is.”

- **Easily shareable content**
  - Supporting quotes:
    - “Digital content to distribute covering common themes and ideas across CTSAs (something like: [http://www.tadapix.com/]).”
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- "Regular news and updates about the program that are easy to use, easy to adapt and work with what we have at each of our hubs."
- "Social media bites or short blog posts on common CTSA functions or services - or templates of these things that can be plugged in for easy posting."

**Graphics and video resources**

- Supporting quotes:
  - "Video how-tos as per the call earlier today (4/18)--I've written scripts and storyboards before, but not for the complex mission of a CTSA. Our videos are not produced this way, currently, so best practice advice from NCATS and CLIC would help me move us away from a 'point and shoot for hours and post unedited' mentality that was here when I joined as CD. We could do so much more with this medium. Video integration into web and social media platforms is growing in importance and will only help tell the stories that underscore the CTSA program's value. Also helpful to know we can send links to stories that appear on other news outlets and don't have to reprise on our CTSA sites before sending a link (no time for redundant effort)."
  - "I think any video resources could add great value to the communications we do."
  - "Simple graphics illustrating key concepts about translational science."

**Clarification from CLIC and NCATS on what they’re looking for**

- Supporting quotes:
  - "The NCATS form to share stories is too clunky and cumbersome and too much of an investment to fill out. There needs to be an easier way to share our successes and we really need to do a better job at LAY-friendly news that shows the value of the program. Some of the material I saw NCATS push out as successes was very dry content. Perhaps CLIC can be a better triage for success stories to help tell the CTSA Program story more effectively."
  - "CLIC could provide examples of stories they have run from the hubs with an explanation of what it is about that particular story that prompted them to share it. CLIC could also create a newsletter that includes content from hubs only–this could be shared among all CTSA hubs monthly or quarterly. It could be a snapshot of what is happening across all of the CTSA hubs."

**Addressing Challenges & Suggestions**

CLIC and NCATS communications are working to address the concerns, suggestions and challenges raised in the Environmental Scan. The following are specific examples of tactics that are either currently in place or are a work in progress:

- Hubs would like to know what other hubs are up to and what’s going on around the consortium.
  - **Action**: CLIC has updated their website [News page](#) to easily highlight news from around the CTSA Program consortium.
  - **Action**: CLIC launched a [Twitter page](#) to share content from around the CTSA Program consortium and keep followers up to date on all things CTSA Program.

- The NCATS Network News and Success Story forms are difficult and time-consuming to find and fill out. It’s also not clear what type of content is “desired.”
Action: CLIC incorporated these forms as fillable documents directly on the News page in an easy to find location.

Action: NCATS created updated CTSA Program “WOW! Factor” form.

Action: CLIC and NCATS will work together to develop clear examples of the type of content we’re looking for.

The CTSA Program can be difficult to communicate about, and hub communicators are low on time and resources.

Action: CLIC and NCATS will work together to develop easy-to-understand and approved messaging about the CTSA Program and translational science that can be used consistently by hub communicators.

Action: As applicable, CLIC and NCATS will provide hub communicators with guidelines and templates for communications-related materials (strategic planning documents, press releases, social posts, etc.).

Action: CLIC will provide content on a regular basis (either through a newsletter or other) that can be easily shared on social by leveraging ‘Click to Tweet’ type options.

Hubs would like to collaborate and learn from one another about communications-related topics, like the use of video, that they can apply to their everyday work.

Action: CLIC and NCATS will work together to incorporate ‘workshop’ style discussions and activities into the quarterly communications call, and also look to coordinate additional opportunities for collaboration and idea-sharing when possible.

Action: CLIC will work to develop a ‘Communications Forum’ where communicators can bounce ideas off each other informally and discuss challenges and solutions.

Conclusion & Next Steps

As the coordinating center for the CTSA Program, one of the CLIC’s primary goals is to facilitate communication and collaboration around the network. In order to do this, CLIC must work with NCATS to provide resources and tools to the key communications contacts at each of the CTSA Program hubs, and it’s evident that most of the hub communicators need some level of additional support.

CLIC will work to develop a page on the CLIC site that will house a variety of communications-related resources, including the ones mentioned above, and continue to directly respond to the feedback from this report.