



A COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

Local Health System Sustainability Project
Task Order 1, USAID Integrated Health Systems IDIQ

AUGUST 2022

Local Health System Sustainability Project

The Local Health System Sustainability Project (LHSS) under the USAID Integrated Health Systems IDIQ helps low- and middle-income countries transition to sustainable, self-financed health systems as a means to support access to universal health coverage. The project works with partner countries and local stakeholders to reduce financial barriers to care and treatment, ensure equitable access to essential health services for all people, and improve the quality of health services. Led by Abt Associates, the five-year, \$209 million project will build local capacity to sustain strong health system performance, supporting countries on their journey to self-reliance and prosperity.

Recommended Citation: The Local Health System Sustainability Project (LHSS) under the USAID Integrated Health Systems IDIQ. August 2022. A Communications Guide for Health Care Professionals. Rockville, MD: Abt Associates.

Date: August 2022

USAID Contract No: 7200AA18D00023 / 7200AA19F00014

Cover page: Jamaica AIDS Support for Life

This report was made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States government.



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OVERVIEW

Jamaica has struggled to vaccinate its population against COVID-19. Since vaccines became available in 2021, only 26 percent of Jamaicans have been vaccinated – a far cry from the country's goal of 65 percent by March 2022. Vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaccine sentiments driven by the spread of misinformation have been cited by health authorities as the main reasons for the low take-up.

Communications around COVID-19 and the vaccine have been a priority for the country. The government, civil society, the private sector, and other players have all invested in communications efforts to combat the spread of misinformation. While many Jamaicans consider the messaging around the vaccines to be educating and encouraging, there are more who believe them to be forceful and do not believe that current communication strategies address their concerns.

In 2021 the government of Jamaica enlisted the support of the private health sector to support the country's vaccination efforts. The USAID funded Local Health System Sustainability Project (LHSS) provided further support to Jamaica's private health sector through direct technical and financial assistance to eight private health care providers administering COVID-19 vaccinations across the island.

One aspect of LHSS support related to communications. The project provided marketing assets including posters for social media and pull up banners. The providers also received marketing and communication trainings aimed at strengthening their capacity to effectively communicate the availability, importance, and safety of COVID-19 vaccines at their locations.

This document combines and simplifies those training materials and will serve as a reference guide that private providers can refer to beyond the LHSS project. This document covers the following topics:

- i. Choosing a target audience
- ii. Developing key messages
- iii. Using the right communication channels
- iv. Facts and strategies for equity in vaccinations



BUILDING A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

What is a Communications Plan and Why is it Important?

A communications plan is a detailed plan that outlines a step-by-step strategy for delivering information to an intended audience. The plan defines who you will communicate with, what information they will receive and what channels you will use to deliver the information.

For private health care professionals, having a communications plan can be an essential component of your business strategy. It can help you to achieve your business goals by enabling you to better connect with your clients and intended audience by promoting and raising awareness of services you offer. This may include raising awareness of services you provide, like COVID-19 vaccines. With careful planning, you can plan to advertise other services your based on need, ahead of time. For example, you may plan to promote your seasonal-flu vaccine offering during the summer months or back-to-school medicals in August as students prepare to return to classes.

Why Should You Develop a Communication Plan?

- A plan will help you target your communication accurately. It gives you a structure to determine whom you need to reach and how.
- A plan can be long-term, helping you map out how to raise your profile and refine your image in the community over time.
- A plan can make your communication efforts more efficient, effective, and lasting.
- A plan makes everything easier. If you spend some time planning at the beginning of an effort, you can save a great deal of time later on, because you know what you should be doing at any point in the process.
- A plan will help you monitor and evaluate how well your communication activities are doing and allows you to make adjustments where necessary.

Elements of a Communications Plan

Developing a communications plan is an intentional step-by-step process. Some of the core elements of a communications plan are¹.

- Determine the goal of your plan: what do you want to achieve?
- Identify your audience: who are the people you want to reach?
- Develop your message: what information do you want your audience to receive?
- Identify your communication channels: how will you share the information and where?
- Consider your resources: what is your budget? What kind of support do you have or need to successfully execute your plan?
- Monitor and track your progress: Is your campaign working? How do you know if you are achieving your goals?

¹ <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/promoting-interest/communication-plan/main>



TARGET AUDIENCE

What is a Target Audience?

A **target audience** is a group of people defined by common characteristics. Audiences can be segmented in many ways. Popular categories or characteristics include segmenting by gender, location, age, perception, subcultures, and interests. Depending on what you are trying to achieve or who you are trying to engage, a target audience can be general (e.g., all women living in Jamaica), or your target audience can be specific (e.g., pregnant women between 25 and 30 living in Kingston). It is possible to have more than one target audience depending on what you wish to achieve.

Why is Having a Target Audience Important?

The process of defining your audience is called targeting. Targeting is a marketing strategy that breaks a large market into smaller segments to concentrate on a specific group of customers within that audience. It defines a segment of customers based on their unique characteristics and focuses solely on serving them. Therefore, instead of trying to reach an entire population, you can maximize efficiency and impact by focusing your time and energy on connecting with a specific, defined group of people.

Having a target audience also shows that you recognize individualism. We are all shaped by different experiences based on factors including gender, age, culture and ability. Therefore, choosing the right audience ensures that you are responding to the needs of that population in a way that will resonate with them.

Benefits of Targeting

For businesses, targeting helps you to offer your services to people who are more likely to be interested in what your business has to offer. In addition, targeting:

- Allows you to identify an audience and outline your intentions for that audience. That is, it allows you to determine what you want them to do.
- Allows you to develop content specifically for people in ways that they will best respond to.
- Allows you to determine the best approach to reach your audience.
- Is cost-effective. Communication efforts can be wasted if not enough attention is paid to clarifying the target audience. Using resources on reaching a specific group of people who are more likely to be interested in what you offer will yield a better return on investment than catering to a large population where your services may not be relevant to the majority.
- In the context of COVID-19, with high rates of vaccine hesitancy and low numbers of vaccine uptake, targeting helps you to navigate an already difficult space by focusing your attention on a defined group of people and their specific concerns with the vaccine.

How to Identify Your Audience

Generally, there are several ways to identify your target audience and they all require some level of knowledge. Companies may choose to do market research if they have the resources. However, using existing and readily available data can also provide insights into audiences. Below are examples of secondary data on Jamaicans' perception of COVID-19 vaccines and communication.



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- A study conducted by the Northern Caribbean University (NCU) shows that 52 percent of Jamaicans are vaccine hesitant. Of that number, 56 percent of young people between the ages 18 and 26 years are vaccine-hesitant compared to 53.5 percent Jamaicans between 27 and 37 years. Similarly, more than half of study participants from a religious community are vaccine hesitant.²
- In an independent poll conducted by the Nationwide Bluedot Polls, as of September 2021, 72 percent of Jamaicans were unsure or would not take the COVID-19 vaccines. Further, 65 percent were unsure or believed the vaccines are unsafe.³
- Concerns about infertility among men and women continue to be raised by Jamaicans as a reason for vaccine hesitancy.⁴

Based on the data above, you may choose the following audiences:

- Young men and women between 18 and 26 years who are vaccine hesitant.
- Parents or hopeful parents who are vaccine hesitant
- Religious individuals.



Photo credit: Jamaica AIDS Support For Life

This graphic, created by Jamaica AIDS Support for Life, is intended to reach a young audience who are vaccine hesitant. It shows a popular male social media influencer saying that he took the vaccine to get back to doing what he loves.

² Bourne, Paul Andrew, et al. "COVID-19 Vaccination Status among University Students in Jamaica" (2021).

³ <https://nationwideradiojm.com/new-polling-finds-most-jamaicans-are-either-uncertain-or-will-not-take-covid-19-vaccine/>

⁴ <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20211016/fertility-fear>



Did You Know?

Sometimes the audience that is the easiest to reach is not the audience that most needs the information or services. For example, 54% of vaccinated people in Jamaica are women; if you display a poster at a health facility that mostly women attend, you are likely missing men, who you need to reach. Different types of people may need different types of communication. Check out the section on “Facts and Strategies for Equity in Jamaica’s COVID-19 Vaccinations” to get ideas about how your campaign can be effective and inclusive.



Local Knowledge

Local knowledge, what you know to be true based on your social upbringing, can also be leveraged to identify your target audience. For example, in Jamaica it is common knowledge that older men are less likely to seek out medical attention when they need it than women. Therefore, for a campaign to encourage persons to get vaccinated, having older men as a one of your target audiences might be a good idea.

While local knowledge is always relevant, it is important that to be mindful our personal biases and how we often indirectly reinforce them. Local knowledge often assumes things about certain groups of people that are not true and if you are not aware of that, your communication campaign may run the risk of further alienating vulnerable and marginalized groups.



Did You Know?

Local knowledge is a collection of facts and relates to the entire system of concepts, beliefs and perceptions that people hold about the world around them. This includes the way people observe and measure their surroundings, and how they solve problems and validate new information. –
FAO

Market research is the process of gathering information about target markets and consumers. It allows a company to discover the target market and get opinions and other feedback from consumers about their interest in the product or service. – Investopedia



Multiple Factors Within a Target Audience

When identities intersect, like gender, religion, and culture, it adds additional nuances that can often be missed. For example, there is a common belief that Rastafarians are unlikely to take the COVID-19 vaccine, leading to the assumption that they are anti-vaccine or vaccine-hesitant. Without proper due diligence, it is easy to run the risk of creating a communication plan that reinforces this and therefore alienates the group on a whole. In reality, a Rastafarian woman for example, may choose not to take the vaccine for any of the following reasons:

- Her understanding of Rastafarianism prefers non-medicinal approaches, therefore promoting wearing a mask, or social distancing may work better.
- Because she is a working mother and cannot risk being ill due to vaccine side effects. Therefore, having flexible hours for administering vaccines might address this.



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- Culturally, because many Rastafarians are distrustful of government interventions. Therefore, promoting your private clinic would yield better results.

When you know enough about your audience, you will have a better understanding of what they are interested in, their concerns, and how to communicate with them. In the next section, we will talk about creating and delivering key messages.



Photo Credit: Jamaica AIDS Support for Life

This image, created by Jamaica AIDS Support for Life, was intended for the religious community where there were high rates of vaccine hesitancy. In-person attendance at churches were restricted for over a year. The image shows a social media influencer who is popular in the Christian community in Jamaica. The caption is written in Jamaican Patois, which makes it more relatable. The caption says she wants to go back to church and the vaccine would help make that happen.



KEY MESSAGES

What are Key Messages?

Key messages are the main points of information you want your audience to hear, understand, remember, and what you want that audience to do. They are important because they are the core of your communication efforts - consistently clarifying what your intentions are and directing the action you want your audience to take. As such key messages should be reflected in all aspects of your marketing strategy.

What Makes a Good Key Message?

Depending on the size of your communication campaign or activity, your key messages may be more detailed, or it could be a few lines that capture what you want your audience to do. Additionally, your key message can be incorporated into your communication assets (like radio ads, and social media posters) as well as stated verbatim (like in an interview).

Below are some pointers for developing an effective key message⁵.

- **Concise:** Key messages should be to the point. You should be able to communicate your message in 30 seconds or less.
- **Relevant:** Balance what you need to communicate with what your audience needs to know.
- **Compelling:** Relay meaningful information to stimulate action.
- **Simple:** Use easy-to-understand language; avoid jargon and acronyms.
- **Memorable:** Ensure that messages are easy to recall and repeat; avoid long, run-on sentences.
- **Tailored:** Communicate effectively with different target audiences by adapting language and depth of information.
- **Call to Action:** Consider what you want your audience to do. Is it to visit your website to schedule a vaccination appointment or to walk-in?



Did You Know?

Have you ever heard a radio advertisement or seen a television ad that evokes an emotional response from you? Messages are not only conveyed using words and phrases but also conveyed through feelings and emotions. The things we see and hear. Therefore, it is important to pay close attention to content development and graphic design because they also send messages. For example, a poorly edited poster might not resonate with the people you are trying to reach. Also, using images of people who look like your target audience indicates to them that your key message is for them.



⁵ https://msktc.org/sites/default/files/Key_Message_Development_508.pdf



Developing Key Messages

Like efforts to identify a target audience, developing key messages should be informed by available evidence – whether local knowledge or information received through surveys or existing research. To develop a key message, you should be able to answer the following questions:

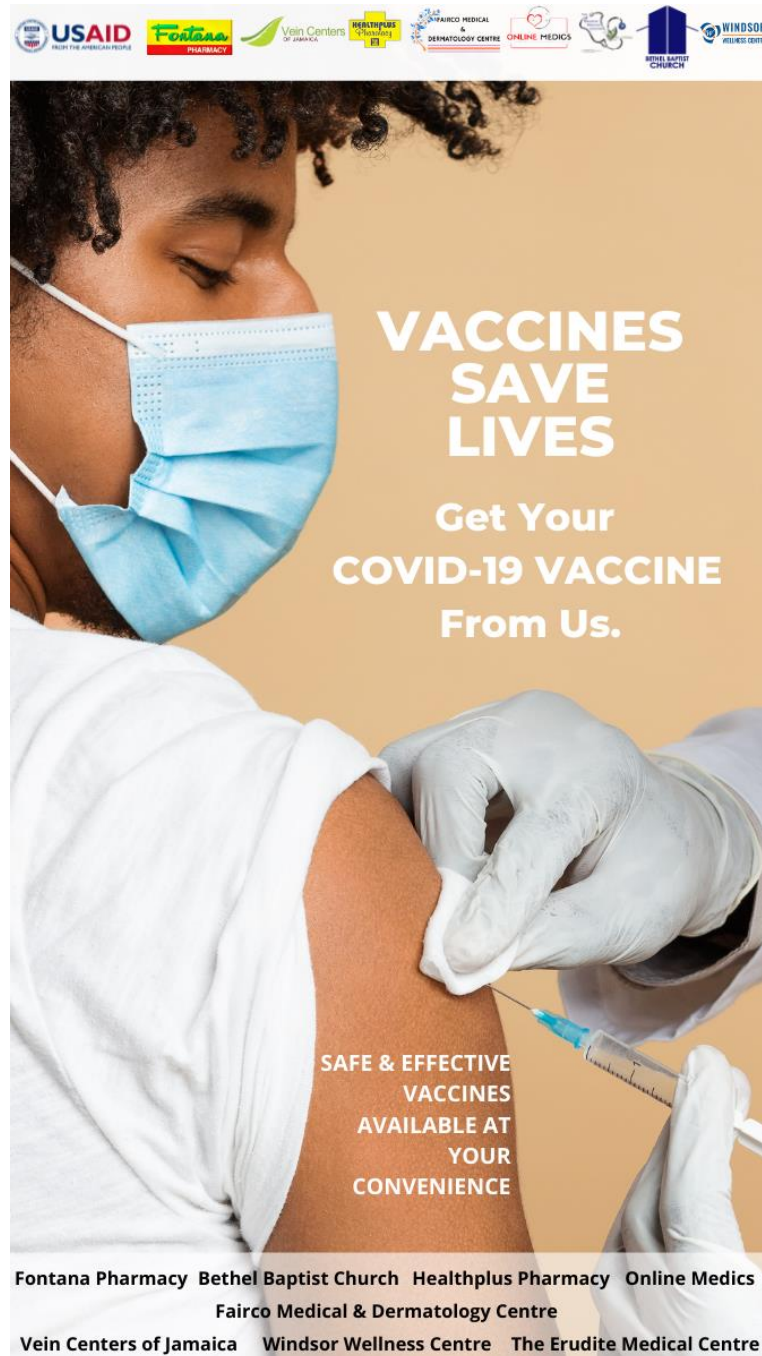
1. What is the problem?
 - e.g., Misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines is prevalent resulting in high rates of vaccine hesitancy among Jamaicans.
2. Why does it matter?
 - e.g., High rates of vaccine hesitancy mean fewer persons are taking the vaccines, putting themselves and others at risk.
3. What action needs to be taken?
 - e.g., encourage and persuade Jamaicans to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

Below are examples of the key messages the LHSS Jamaica team used in their communication support to the private providers. Using available information, the team found that accessibility, safety, and reliability, were identified as significant contributors to vaccine hesitancy. Therefore, the following messages were created:

1. **Accessible:** COVID-19 vaccines are even more accessible. Jamaicans can be vaccinated for free, at eight additional private sector providers all over the island.
2. **Safe and Reliable:** COVID-19 vaccines are safe and the private health care providers are properly vetted and supervised by the MoHW to ensure that they administer vaccines following national guidelines and standard operating procedures.

It is important to note that circumstances change which may require you to change or modify your key messages. As such, it is a good to always be aware of changing sentiments about COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines and adjust your messaging accordingly.

Once you have identified your target audience and what you want to communicate to them, you can then begin thinking about how to reach them. In the next section, we will talk about communication channels.



This image, created by LHSS, was created to raise awareness of the private health facilities that are administering COVID-19 vaccines in Jamaica under the LHSS project. In keeping with the key messages that were used in the communications plan, the image emphasizes the core messages by saying 'vaccines save lives' and 'safe and effective vaccines available at your service'.



COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

What is a Communication Channel?

A communication channel or media channel refers to the medium through which you plan to engage your target audience. Depending on your audience, the communication channel you use may vary. Popular channels include traditional and digital media options.

Types of Communication Channels

Traditional Media	Digital Media
Physical Mail Radio Ads Television Ads Billboards and signs Telemarketing Events Print Ads (newspaper)	Social Media Email Websites Blogs Videos Online and Mobile Ads

Choosing the Right Communication Channel

While there are a lot of communication channels to choose from, it is important to carefully consider which ones best fit with your goals and target audience. Again, this decision needs to be informed by the available data. Take time to research so that you are choosing the right platform to deliver your messages.

Here are some pointers on how to find the right communication channel:⁶

- Know your budget: some communication channels like television, radio and billboards can be expensive, while social media platforms can offer cost-effective options to reach your intended audience.
- Consider all channels: List all the communication channels you think might be critical to achieving your goals. You can choose multiple channels if they will serve different purposes to reach your target audience or to better deliver specific messages.
- Audience relevance: Consider how likely it is that your audience will interact with each channel. If you're confident that a certain one would guarantee a high level of engagement, you may accept greater costs or difficulties to use it.
- Time: Some communication channels require substantial lead time. For example, even if your company would benefit from television ads, you have to have enough time to plan, shoot and edit one.

⁶ <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/communication-channels-marketing>



Did You Know?

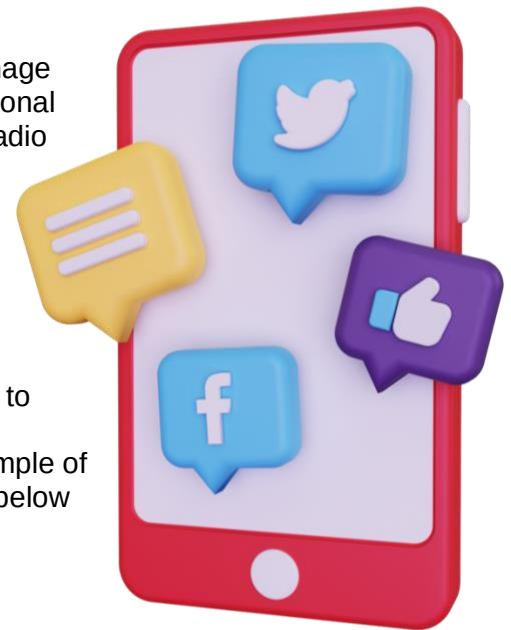
While television and radio ads may be expensive, arranging interviews on popular radio or tv programmes is another way to engage traditional media while saving money. Some radio programmes might request payment for interviews; depending on how you frame an issue's relevance, you may be able to book a free interview. Leveraging your key messages can help!



Social Media

Social media is a great and cost-effective tool that allows you to manage and reach the right people. While it is true that you can access traditional media platforms that have a niche audience, for example, religious radio stations, it is often difficult to estimate how many persons hear or see your ad. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have evolved over the years to allow you to curate and refine your target audience in ways that traditional media cannot. It also allows you to track how well your ad is doing and allows you to adjust where necessary.

Earlier we discussed the importance of targeting and how it can help to maximize efficiency and impact by focusing your time and energy on connecting with a specific, defined group of people. Below is an example of how social media can help you refine your audience. The examples below are from Instagram and Facebook.



Cancel **Create audience** Done

1.4M - 1.6M
Estimated audience size
Too broad

Audience name

Locations
Jamaica

Interests

Age and gender
All | 18-65 years

Example 1

Cancel **Edit audience** Done

71.5K - 84.2K
Estimated audience size
Great

Audience name
Prenatal care

Locations
Kingston, Jamaica

Interests
Parenting or Family

Age and gender
Female | 25-35 years

Example 2



Let's say you are interested in advertising your prenatal care services to women in your area. In the first image, Example 1, you indicated that you want to reach both men and women between 18 and 65 years, living in Jamaica. Note that the platform informs you that your audience is too broad. That is because it is unlikely that all 1.4 million to 1.6 million individuals who match those criteria would be interested in what you are offering. Therefore, you would be utilizing resources to reach individuals who would not access your services.

The second image, Example 2, has a more detailed audience. It gives a specific geographic area and specifies the sex and the age range of the persons you are attempting to reach. The reach between the two is significantly different, but you are more likely to have a larger return on investment by focusing on 84,000 women compared to 1.6 million people.



CREATING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Our own biases and lack of awareness of the differential needs of clients can impact the experience of individuals, resulting in them not seeking care. Biases are often rooted in cultural relations, and we may not always be aware of how these biases permeate other aspects of our life, like how we communicate.

In the section on local knowledge, we used the example of the common knowledge that older Jamaican men are less likely to seek medical attention than women. If we took that common knowledge and created a communication strategy that says "Real Men Take Vaccines" it might not be received well. This is because this type of messaging does not address or alleviate the legitimate concerns that men may have, but instead can be seen as shaming or pressuring, which can have negative consequences.

For health care providers, the recommendations below can help you get one step closer to being inclusive and effectively reaching your target audience:

- **Be Open to Other Viewpoints:** What you already know is important, however, it is equally important to not make assumptions and to acknowledge that what you know, may not be what other people know and believe.
- **Take All Concerns Seriously:** Myths about COVID-19 and the vaccines are pervasive. There is a lot of misinformation that many people believe and are influenced by. It is critical to acknowledge this influence and take it seriously, rather than dismissing the myth, paying particular attention to why they believe the myth.
- **Listen and Empathize:** The best way to respond to a client's needs is to listen and appreciate where they are coming from.
- **Key Messages:** Knowing your clients' specific concerns allows you to address them, rather than making assumptions and giving generic responses. As not everyone has the same concerns regarding vaccines, being inclusive allows you to convey the right messages to the right audience.
- **Representing Diversity:** Visual portrayals in vaccination campaigns should include diversity in images. Aim to portray women, men, girls, and boys, as well as people of different ages, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and ability statuses.

Facts and Strategies for Equity in Jamaica's COVID-19 Vaccinations

Gender, location, age, ability, religion, subculture, and other factors can impact a person's access to information, services, and resources. Examples of this are included below in red. Strategies to address inequity are below in blue.



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LGBTQI+ people are frequently ignored or excluded by the health system.

More women in Jamaica are vaccinated compared to men.

Small sensitization sessions lead by the right people can address hesitancy

More men in Jamaica have died of COVID-19 than women.

Harmful norms of masculinity often contribute to men having less involvement with the health system and taking more health risks.

Use diverse imagery in communications to reach more people

Engage women- and/or community-focused organizations in planning and implementation

Women are less likely to believe vaccination is the only solution.

Think about different forms of communication (ex: radio, social media) to reach different people

Emphasize the advantages of vaccine beyond disease protection (ex: potentially less time away from work)

Men reportedly experienced more income reductions with COVID-19 measures and do not want to miss work.

There are gender-specific myths including fertility challenges

Utilize existing gender focal points if available to draft messages

Rastafari distrust certain medical interventions from a history of racial injustice

Cost and feasibility of accessing vaccine sites is influenced by different factors for different people

Consider diverse locations and times for vaccine delivery

Acknowledge and provide thorough information to dispel myths

Young people are not always the primary decision-makers about their own health.

Women are more likely to cite the vaccine as too new and they are afraid of side effects.

Check the data to see what type of people you are missing

Identify community champions who are trusted sources of information to help with communication plans