



CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND THE COVID VACCINE ROLLOUT

How a transparent, efficient and empathetic crisis communication plan can enhance civic engagement and support smooth vaccine plan implementation

The COVID-19 vaccine rollout poses multiple challenges for government leaders. One challenge is the logistics of implementing vaccine distribution in a short period of time. This requires collaboration between government and external organizations on every step of the rollout, including manufacturing, shipping and delivery.

Another concern is how to manage the confusion and mistrust among residents regarding the vaccine. People are uncertain about when they can get the vaccine, where vaccination sites are located, and how to sign up. In addition to this uncertainty, constituents face widespread misinformation about the virus and the vaccine from a variety of sources.

A successful vaccine rollout requires clear communication between constituents and government. Unfortunately, many state and local governments have struggled with effective vaccine plan communication. Some websites that provide information on the vaccine and web portals for signing up for appointments have crashed, keeping people from getting the information and services they need. Even when accurate information on the vaccine is available to the public, it can be hard to find.

At the same time, the public has high expectations for government's digital services and communication.

"People today engage digitally in hundreds of ways," says Angy Peterson, vice president of digital engagement services for Granicus. "They need and demand the same transparency and ease-of-use in government vaccine communication as they do when tracking their personal shipments online."

This kind of seamless government communication is vital not only for the vaccine rollout, but also in crisis communication in general. Agencies require rapid communication systems so

"People today engage digitally in hundreds of ways. They need and demand the same transparency and ease-of-use in government vaccine communication as they do when tracking their personal shipments online."

Angy Peterson, Vice President of Digital Engagement Services, Granicus

they can move quickly in any emergency, whether it is a public health crisis or a natural disaster.

Government agencies can turn to crisis communication strategies and solutions to relay vaccine information, fight misinformation and foster trust in state and local government.

A CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR EVERYONE

An essential piece of any crisis communication plan is an effective crisis communication platform. An ideal platform contains integrated digital and communications services, allowing government to take an omnichannel approach to reaching residents. Government should be able to write one message and have it post across multiple channels. This is critical when a government agency has limited resources and needs to get a message out quickly.

These messages should be automated and tailored to each recipient based on subscriber data, including age group, vaccine eligibility and other relevant categories. This ensures subscribers will receive information specific to them, on the platform they prefer.

These kinds of integrated solutions do more than just provide information to citizens; they are also data-gathering tools.

"Each citizen touchpoint provides insight into a person or community's needs, behaviors and interests," says Peterson.

“Over time, agencies can get a sense of who opens what kind of message, and how frequently.”

“Communications technology needs to meet people where they are,” adds Patrick Moore, vice president of business development at Granicus.

An omnichannel, integrated data-driven platform can help governments create equitable access to vaccine information.

STICK TO THE FACTS

Government needs to ensure messages about vaccinations are not only easily accessible to all, but also that the content is clear and effective.

According to a Granicus study of 199 million vaccine-related messages, the public desires informative messaging from government. Communications related to vaccine availability, safety and efficacy yielded 40 percent better engagement than typical communications.

Constituents also want action-oriented messaging around vaccinations. Specifically, people want directions for how to sign up for the vaccine. The same Granicus study showed that these kinds of “how-to” communications yielded 60 percent higher engagement than other types of messaging.

Based on this data, it’s clear that people want government to provide them with fact-based information regarding the vaccine, and then want clear steps on how to go about getting a vaccination themselves.

To ensure recipients will open, read and trust any government vaccine-related communications, all information must be fact-driven. Not only should government communications lay out information as clearly as possible, but they should also share corroborating sources when available.

When government provides unbiased facts, “people feel both informed and proactively supported by state and local governments,” says Peterson.

APPROACHING COMMUNICATION WITH EMPATHY

No matter what message government is trying to convey, it must focus on transparency in any vaccination-related communication.

As Moore explains, “When people believe they are consistently receiving transparent information from a source, that is how trust is developed.”

One strategy for building this trust is identifying key influencers within local communities. By partnering with respected community leaders ranging from local pastors to school administrators, government can gain constituents’ trust and amplify its message. This is particularly vital in underserved communities where vaccine information might be critical, but trust in government communication is low.

More broadly, government can build trust with local populations by approaching communications from a place of empathy. By learning about the communities and the individuals they want to communicate with, government can find thoughtful ways to engage and thus build trust.

“By showing some empathy in how you approach a communication plan together, you increase your likelihood that you can reach somebody with the information they need,” says Moore. “Once you provide the right information, you’ve now given them the opportunity to act on that information.”

This piece was written and produced by the GOVERNING Content Studio, with information and input from Granicus.

GOVERNING

Produced by: THE FUTURE OF STATES AND LOCALITIES

Governing covers politics, policy and management for state and local government leaders. Recognized as the most credible and authoritative voice in its field, Governing provides non-partisan news, insight and analysis on budget and finance; transportation and infrastructure; workforce and economic development; health and human services and more. Governing is a division of e.Republic, the nation’s only media and research company focused exclusively on state and local government and education. www.governing.com

For:  GRANICUS

Granicus connects governments with the people they serve by providing the first and only civic engagement platform for the public sector. More than 4,500 federal, state and local government agencies and 250 million citizen subscribers power an unmatched Subscriber Network that turns government missions into quantifiable results. With comprehensive cloud-based solutions for communications, government website design, online service delivery, meeting and agenda management software, and records management, Granicus empowers stronger relationships between government and citizens. **Learn more about how Granicus can digitize government services in days.**