NORTH CAROLINA FOUNDATIONAL CAPABILITIES

UNC NORTH CAROLINA INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

arclet

WNC HEALTH NETWORK

Strengthening Health Communications Infrastructure

A Hands-On Workshop from North Carolina's Collaborative Network

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Brandon Romstadt, Communications Director, WNC Health Network

Welcome & Intros

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Agenda

1. Welcome
2. The Communications Gap
3. Our Story from Western NC
4. Arclet
5. NC Collaborative Network
6. Your Turn: One Action Step
7. Closing & Next Steps

Results:

- Understand the value of collaborative work
- Offer a roadmap for collaboration
- Identify ways to integrate collaboration into your work

Comms as a Foundational Capability & Accreditation Requirements

PHAB & Foundational Capabilities Ask Us To...

- Increase visibility of public health issues and communicate risks
- Transmit and receive routine communications 24/7
- Deliver proactive, culturally & linguistically appropriate health education
- Reflect the cultural and linguistic character of the local population (Title VI)
- Implement & evaluate population-based health promotion and prevention programs

The Public Health Communications Gap

Information Ecosystem:

- Information overload
- Rapid spread of misinformation
- Erosion of public trust

Public Health Communicators:

- Chronic under-resourcing
- Time & capacity constraints
- Fragmented workflows

Building Blocks of North Carolina's Communications Capacity

- High and growing **public trust** in NC public health
- Strategic **investments** in workforce & infrastructure through PHIG
- Proven **regional models** to scale statewide
- Strong **partnerships** between state, regional, and local health departments & other key partners

The WNC Story

WNC Health Network is a 501(c)3 with a 30-year history of working with people and organizations to create **healthy and thriving communities** in western North Carolina.

- Build local and regional capacity to plan, facilitate, implement, and evaluate **community health improvement** efforts.
- Collect, curate, and communicate high-quality, regional, population-level **health data**.
- Support and enhance **health communications**.

The WNC Health Communicators Collaborative

March 2019: WNC Health Network organized a group of local hospital and health department-based health communicators, now known as the **WNC Health Communicators Collaborative**

September 2020: Launched a three-month regional COVID-19 health communications campaign pilot in five WNC counties

December 2020 - May 2022: Success of this pilot led to the launch of our collaborative regional (22 participants) COVID-19 campaign, **My Reason WNC**

June 2022 - Present: WNC Health Communicators Collaborative continues to meet monthly

March 2023 - June 2024: Ran the **View From Here WNC** campaign—a regional campaign (20 participants) addressing substance misuse, mental health, healthy eating/ active living, and COVID-19/Flu

PARTNERS

- Local Health Departments
- Community Organizations
- Hospitals
- Universities
- FQHCs
- Community Health Workers
- EMS/County Government

The WNC Health Communicators Collaborative

Above: WNC Health Communicators Collaborative members at a meeting in Madison County, 2019

October 2024: Facilitated the WNC Ready Campaign in response to a regional need for Helene recovery messaging to ensure that residents had the resources the needed after the storm.

Above: WNC Health Communicators Collaborative members in Haywood County, June 2024

Current: Facilitating community listening sessions that will inform our next regional campaign which will focus on mental health.

Above: WNC Health Communicators Collaborative members at a meeting in Henderson County, 2025

"Even if you're not at high risk like me, it's important to get vaccinated."
— Margarita Ramirez
#MyReasonWNC

"I got vaccinated to keep my family safe and play with my friends."
— Carter
#MyReasonWNC

"When I got my shot, I wanted to be brave to show others it's important to be vaccinated."
— Trinnity Jackson
#MyReasonWNC

"Es muy importante mantener la salud mental. Creo que muchas veces la gente se olvida de que tiene que cuidarse."
-MICHAEL CHAVIS

Breathe in.
3 SECONDS

POLICE
FRANKLIN

"I hope to one day pass the love of cooking to my daughter and share meals with her."
—Isabel
#ViewFromHereWNC

"Exercising is one way that I like to strengthen my mental wellness."
—Kelly
#ViewFromHereWNC

"Cuando estaba ahí fuera, me hubiera gustado que la gente me mirara como una hija o una hermana, una persona a quien alguien."
—Alivea T.
#pareceWNC

"We can go through so many struggles in life and we can overcome them and still come out on the other side."
-BRITTANY D.

"Anybody who has ever struggled in any way can relate to what those of us who struggle with substance use or other mental health challenges go through."
#SeeMeWNC

LEARN HOW TO APPLY FOR FEMA ASSISTANCE
AND DISCOVER OTHER RESOURCES

GETTING BACK TO LIFE AFTER DISASTER
SMALL STEPS TO BRING YOU BACK TO YOURSELF
WNC READY

Regional Impact of Collaborative Campaign Approach

Build Awareness

Build Trust

Take Action

Inspire Change

More Than Just Regional Campaigns

Developing Expertise

| In-Person Events
| Minishops
| Conferences/Conference Funding
| Study Hall/Book Club/Office Hours

Building Capacity

| Media Partnerships
| Internship Pipelines
| Equitable Communications Initiatives
| Communicators Login Pages
| Arclet
| Toolkit Development
| Regional Campaigns

Creating Equitable Infrastructure

| Regional Emergency Preparedness Plan
| Media Communications Strategies
| Subcommittees
| Weekly Communications Updates

How Has Collaboration Added Value for Members?

Participation builds capacity to support communications in their communities.

Participation is a benefit to their organization and to their communities

94%

100%

Participation has helped them become a better communicator

Collaborative tools and resource add value to our members.

"I think this collaborative is a great opportunity to stay up-to-date with relevant communications tools and strategies, stakeholders, and missions. It also feels like a genuinely safe space."

"WNC CC helps build a unified message and strategy to communicate within our region. Combining our shared resources and areas of expertise is a force multiplier."

"Because of the collaborative I have access to tools, training, and expertise of other communicators in the region."

Impact of WNC Work & Priorities Moving Forward

- **Outcomes from WNC collaboration that connect to statewide momentum:**
  - Continuing statewide PIO calls
  - LHD directors prioritizing comms and funding
  - Higher public trust scores in NC

- **Strategic priorities that emerged:**
  - Customizable templates from NC DHHS
  - Shared messaging calendars
  - Tech tools (Arclet)
  - Training & peer learning

https://nciom.org/future-of-local-public-health-in-north-carolina/

Your Turn:

What strategies, resources, relationships, or systems are helping you meet your communications goals?

Your Turn:

What are your biggest challenges related to communications?

How a Rural Collaborative Sparked a National Innovation

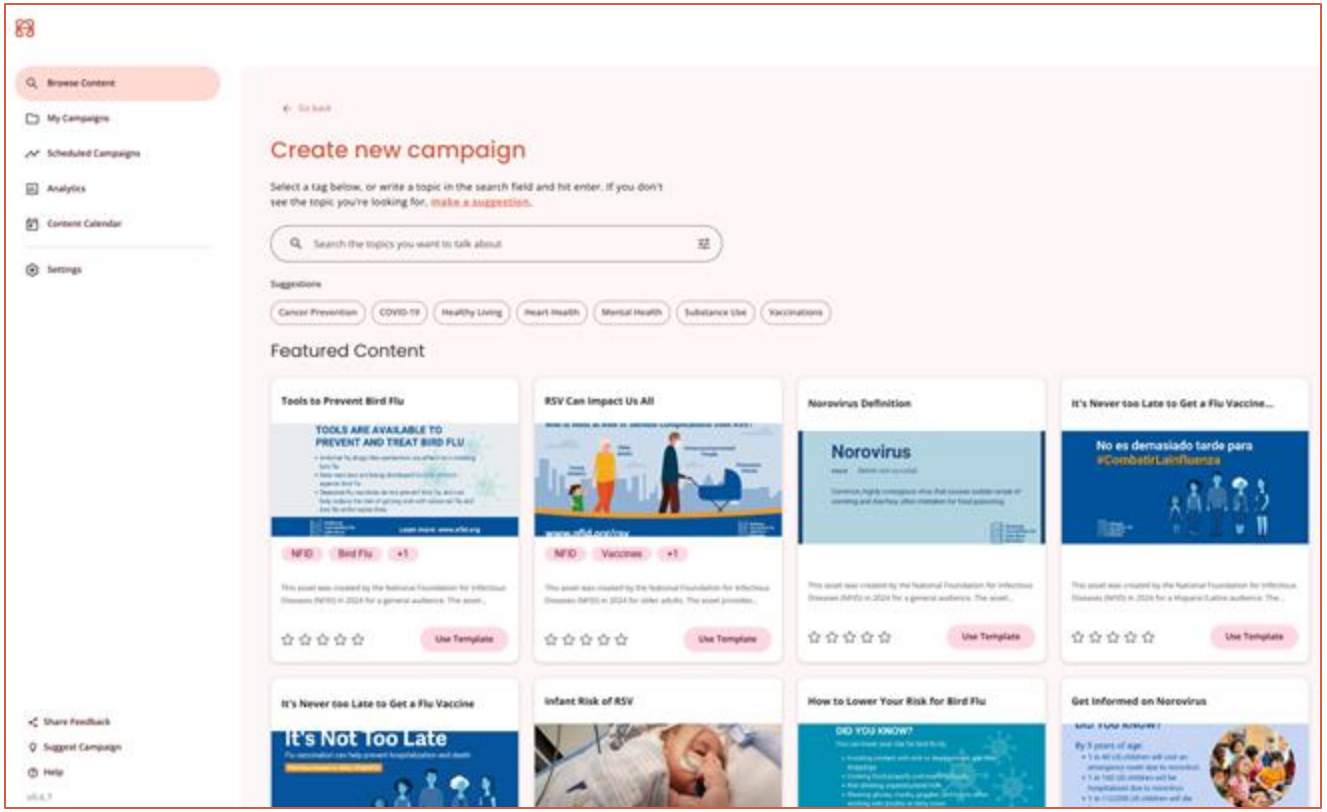
How can we scale…

1. Peer support & collaboration
2. Increased capacity to post consistently on social media platforms
3. Adaptation of existing materials
4. Local tailoring
5. Community feedback
6. Shared performance measures
7. Rapid evaluation & improvement

Scenes from Adrienne's journey to build a scalable platform out of collaborative learning in WNC

A Purpose-Built Platform for Public Health Communications

Demo


Browse Content
My Campaigns
Scheduled Campaigns
Analytics
Content Calendar
Settings
Share Feedback
Suggest Campaign
Help
Create new campaign
Select a tag below, or write a topic in the search field and hit enter. If you don't see the topic you're looking for, make a suggestion.
Search the topics you want to talk about
Suggestions
Cancer Prevention
COVID-19
Healthy Living
Heart Health
Mental Health
Substance Use
Vaccinations
Featured Content
Tools to Prevent Bird Flu
TOOLS ARE AVAILABLE TO PREVENT AND TREAT BIRD FLU
NFID
Bird Flu
+1
Use Template
RSV Can Impact Us All
NFID
Vaccines
+1
Use Template
Norovirus Definition
Norovirus
Use Template
It's Never too Late to Get a Flu Vaccine...
No es demasiado tarde para #CombatirLaInfluenza
Use Template
It's Never too Late to Get a Flu Vaccine
It's Not Too Late
Infant Risk of RSV
How to Lower Your Risk for Bird Flu
DID YOU KNOW?
Get Informed on Norovirus

Real Results for Health Agencies

- Supports coordinated, consistent messaging
- Leverages trusted messengers
- Increases capacity for under-resourced teams
- Data-driven evaluation & improvement
- Supports preparedness & rapid response
- Sustainability beyond grant cycles

… and for Communities

➔ Greater awareness, reduced stigma, services utilized, lives saved, stronger health information ecosystem

"We are integrating all of our health communication messaging assets into Arclet to ensure timely access to credible information."

— Deanna Hawkes, Director of Strategic Communications, NCDHHS

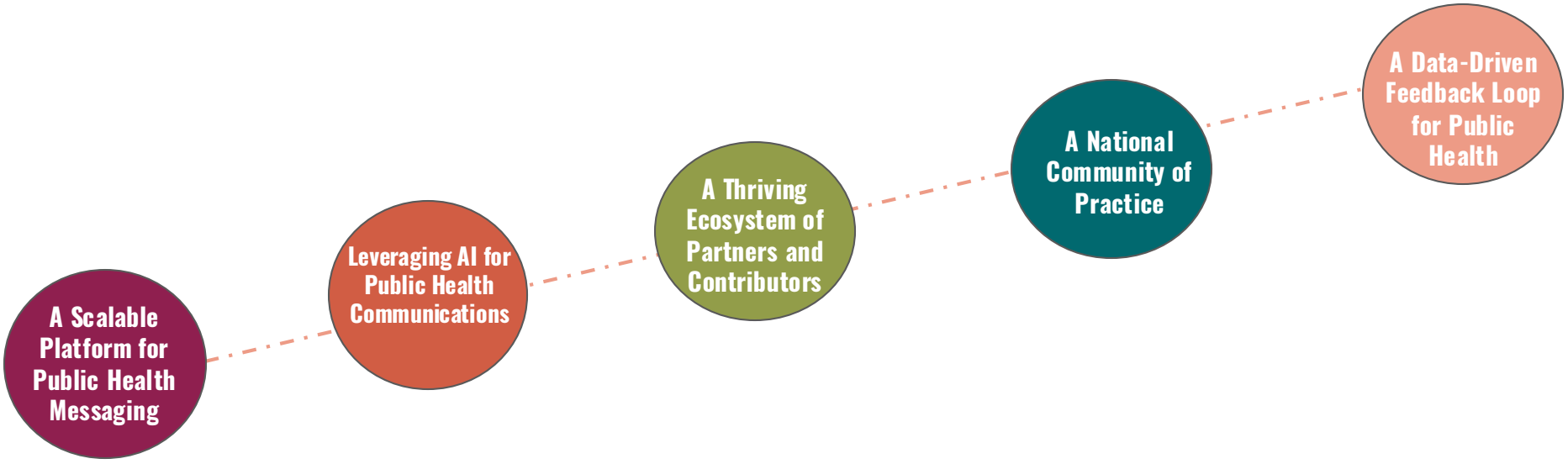
"Arclet fills communication gaps and ensures messages resonate and lead to measurable impact."

— Dr. Amy Joy Lanou, Director, NC Institute for Public Health

NCDHHS

THE NORTH CAROLINA Institute *for* Public Health

Arclet's Vision



Long-Term Impact: *Millions more reached with timely, trusted public health information. Local voices empowered to lead public health storytelling. Stronger communications infrastructure for the next emergency—and the everyday.*

Your Turn:

What other partners do we need to engage?

Who is missing from your communications network?

Trust in NC Public Health

Perception of Public Health's Role is Expanding

North Carolinians increasingly view public health as responsible not only for disease prevention, but also for:

- Ensuring access to health care for all
- Responding to natural disasters
- Providing reliable health information
- Protecting people from environmental hazards

Trust in Local and State Public Health is Strong and Growing

Compared to 2024, trust has increased:

- 73% trust local health departments quite a lot or a great deal
- 67% of North Carolinians have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in NCDHHS
- Ratings for caring, effectiveness and credibility of public health institutions have improved

Public Health in Action: Hurricane Helene

Hurricane Helene proved the value of local and state public health response:

- 73% of residents in affected areas recalled timely health communications
- 70% rated their local health department's response as excellent or good
- 63% of North Carolinians rated NCDHHS's response to Hurricane Helene as good or excellent, a figure that outpaces FEMA and other agencies

Source: Perceptions of Public Health in North Carolina: Wave II Findings. February 2025.

North Carolina's Foundational Capabilities Initiative: Communications

- **Initiative Lead:** NC Division of Public Health + NC Institute for Public Health
- **Goal:** Strengthen public health communications infrastructure and expertise statewide.
- **Why:** Communication ranked #1 priority for added resources by both state and local health staff.

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Guiding Principles
(from partner convenings)

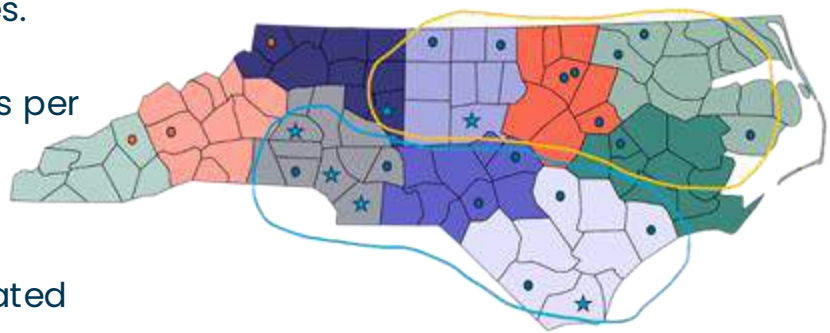
- **Trust First:** Between collaborators, and between messengers and communities.
- **Local Relevance:** Visuals, voices, and cultural representation matter.
- **Community Ownership:** Engagement improves outcomes and reinforces trust.
- **Plan for the Long Game:** Multi-month, co-designed campaigns yield greater impact.
- **Time-Saving Tools:** Vital for communicators balancing multiple roles.
- **Storytelling Power:** Human stories illustrate the “why” and inspire behavior change.

Partners:

- NC DPH Communications Team
- Public Information Officers Network
- NC Public Health Collaboration Communications Workgroup
- WNC Health Communicators Collaborative
- Arclet
- J&S Consulting
- Ameena Batada, DrPH
- FC Task Force Communications Group

The Communications Collaborative Framework

- **Build the Network –** Convene health communicators from LHDs, state agencies, and community-based orgs.
- **Equip with Tools –** Provide access to platforms (Arclet), resource repositories, and short courses.
- **Engage & Retain –** Recruit 10–12 communicators per collaborative, fostering peer learning and trust.
- **Activate in the Field –** Co-create and pilot local/regional campaigns; prepare for coordinated crisis response.



Takeaways for Other States

- Map and connect existing communicator groups before launching new ones.
- Use co-design to decide collaborative focus areas (region, topic, audience).
- Invest in shared tools and training that can be localized.
- Leverage small, quick-win campaigns to build momentum for larger statewide initiatives.
- Prepare systems for rapid, regional crisis communication before the next event.

Above: Communicators from NC at the National Conference on Health Communication, Marketing & Media, Atlanta 2025

Your Turn:

If you could adapt one element of what we've shared this afternoon to your own state/agency, what would it be?

Resources

Arclet

- Learn more & sign up for a free trial at: www.arclet.com
- Join a monthly webinar, subscribe to our newsletter, and/or request a 1:1 demo.

Professional Networks & Peer Learning

- National Public Health Information Coalition (NPHIC) - www.nphic.org
  - Professional association for public health communication professionals.
  - Offers training, campaigns, and a network of state/local PIOs.
- Public Health Communications Collaborative (PHCC) - www.publichealthcollaborative.org
  - Provides ready-to-use messaging, training webinars, and guidance on emerging health issues.

Additional ASTHO Resources

- Social Media Toolkit, Media Relations Toolkit, & Branding Resource Guide for LHDs
- ASTHO Communications Trainings
- PHIG Success Stories Page
- Communication Resources on PHinfrastructure.org

Your Turn:

A single, actionable step you can take in the next 30 days to strengthen communications capability.

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Thank you!

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