

Multi-Grantee Technical Assistance Meeting— Successful Dissemination Strategies

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Chapter 1. Background

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and its National Resource Center for Health IT (NRC) are firmly committed to the timely and effective dissemination of AHRQ-funded research. With the ever-increasing emphasis on putting research into practice, AHRQ is interested in finding effective ways for clinicians and consumers to learn about research in progress and rapidly become aware of new knowledge related to the use of health information technology (health IT) to improve quality. The timely demonstration of the real-world impact of AHRQ-funded research may lead to changes in the practice of health care and accelerate adoption of evidence-based practices in clinical work environments.

Although dissemination of research findings and new knowledge is a critical component of all research projects, researchers sometimes overlook or devalue it as a non-research activity that takes place “after the fact.” Grantees often ask how they can best disseminate and publish their findings. Given AHRQ’s goal to encourage broad dissemination of research and the challenges faced by grantees to publish and inform others about their work, AHRQ sponsored a multi-grantee open forum to support grantees in this important work. The forum provided a venue to help grantees change how they think about research dissemination and to encourage them to adopt a strategic communications perspective from the beginning of the project.

Presenters for the Webinar included the following subject matter experts, both internal and external to AHRQ:

- Margo Edmunds, Ph.D.; Booz Allen Hamilton and The Johns Hopkins University—*Making the Case for Effective Dissemination*
- Julie McGowan, Ph.D.; University of Indiana School of Medicine—*Innovative Strategies for Dissemination*
- Kristie Kiser; Office of Communications and Knowledge Transfer (OCKT), AHRQ—*How AHRQ Can Help Disseminate Your Findings*
- Rebecca Roper, M.S., M.P.H.; NRC, AHRQ—*Guidance on Final Report Submission*

Chapter 2. Meeting Summary

This section provides an overview of each presenter’s materials and concludes with a recap of questions asked during the presentations.

Making the Case for Effective Dissemination

Margo Edmunds, Ph.D.

Research results are often difficult to disseminate for many reasons: lack of knowledge about how to tailor core research messages to target audiences, lack of access to communications and marketing resources at stand-alone or smaller institutions, and lack of understanding about how to translate research into practical knowledge for clinicians. During this Webinar, Dr. Edmunds encouraged researchers to think about dissemination from the beginning of their projects, by asking questions such as: Who is the ultimate audience for these research findings? What results do I want to see from dissemination (i.e., behavior or practice changes, additional research, and so on)? How can I reach the target audiences (i.e., via professional organizations, meetings, Web sites, blogs, and/or interviews with the media)?

Dr. Edmunds provided very practical suggestions on how to tailor messages, e.g., appreciate the perspective of the audience and use familiar and plain language. Other suggestions related to how to work with the media—Dr. Edmunds encouraged researchers to use resources at their institutions such as the office of public affairs/communications/marketing, and to contact AHRQ’s Office of Communications and Knowledge Transfer (OCKT). Press releases, issue briefs, white papers, and fact sheets are also effective vehicles for dissemination and are often “picked up” by search engines. It is important for researchers to be able to summarize their research findings effectively and succinctly.

Innovative Strategies for Dissemination

Julie McGowen, Ph.D.

Publication in peer-reviewed journals remains the “gold standard” for researchers. However, given that first-tier journals accept less than 5 percent of articles submitted to them, researchers should consider other publications, including discipline-specific journals and health IT/medical informatics journals (link patient care to outcomes).

To begin the publication process, researchers should define their target audience, select a publication, and identify what is important for that particular publication. Be sure to read “Instructions to Authors” and address exactly what that journal has specified.

To help journal reviewers determine whether the research should be published in a particular journal, the following questions are often asked:

- Does the article work within the parameters of the publication?
- Will the content inform the knowledge base?
- Is this new research or is it repetitious? If repetitious, is there a unique aspect that warrants publication?
- Are references current? (References need to be current and reflect a clear awareness of current research activity in that specific aspect of health IT.)
- Does the content fit the length?
- Is the writing comprehensible? (When writing, use an outline and stay on track.)
- If research-related, is the study design solid?

Dr. McGowen also noted that if a publication is funded by AHRQ it needs to be cited for two reasons: (1) credit to AHRQ for funding the project and (2) recognition by peer reviews. In addition, if reviewers feel that an article will be extremely useful and frequently cited, the likelihood of it being accepted will increase.

When developing a manuscript, it is important to remember that journals will rarely accept the initial manuscript. Typically, the author will need to revise the article in response to suggestions from the reviewers. Alternatives to peer-review print journals include e-Journals (often publicly available at no charge), published and indexed proceedings, major scientific abstracts, and editorial review publications.

How OCKT Can Help Disseminate Findings

Kristie Kiser

OCKT has expertise to assist researchers with dissemination of their findings and will work with grantees to identify target audiences, develop messages, articulate stories, and prepare for interviews. OCKT also provides media training and helps with media outreach. Once an article has been accepted for publication, grantees should notify OCKT via email at journalpublishing@ahrq.hhs.gov. OCKT will track the grantees’ articles and publication dates and collaborate with grantee institutions to determine what kind of outreach is already under way for the article.

If used correctly, the media (e.g., independent press, newspapers, television, Web, and blogs) can be an excellent tool for dissemination. When working with the media, researchers must play

dual roles, as both scientists and communicators (to make the science relevant). It is important to use simple language, along with the traditional “message pyramid” approach: headline, facts, anecdotes/examples/analogies, bottom line.

AHRQ Final Reports

Rebecca Roper, M.S., M.P.H.

For the first time, AHRQ will begin to publish grantees’ final reports on the AHRQ NRC Web site, making the reports far more accessible to the public than they have been historically. The Webinar included review of several requirements for publishing the final reports, which are available <http://www.ahrq.gov/fund/postawrd.htm#closeout>. The link to the AHRQ Grant Final Progress Report template is <http://www.ahrq.gov/fund/reptemp.htm>.

Grantees should always reference the AHRQ grant number in any peer-review publication or presentation. Grantees should first direct questions about the Final Financial Reports, Invention Statements and Final Reports to their grants management specialist and then to the program official. Final Reports should be 4 to 20 pages in length; should not include copyrighted, private, or proprietary information; and should address applicability to AHRQ priority populations (in narrative and table formats.) Webinar attendees received three examples of Final Reports from current grantees.

Within 90 days of the completion of a project, grantees should email Final Reports to the grant email address (grantfpr@ahrq.gov) and to Angela Lavanderos at Angela.Lavanderos@ahrq.hhs.gov. The project officer will provide feedback, and the grantee may need to revise accordingly. In addition to posting to the NRC Web site, reports will also be published on the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) Web site. When contacting NTIS, it is best to provide the grant number, title, and principal investigator to help locate the report.

Chapter 3. Questions and Answers

During the question-and-answer portion of the Webinar, an attendee asked about making AHRQ research available on public Web sites. Several years ago, the National Library of Medicine proposed that all federally funded research leading to publication should be made available for public access. Congress passed a bill to this effect, requiring posting of federally funded research on PubMed Central one year after the original publication date. AHRQ is interested in publishing grantees' research in this manner and will address this issue in the near future.

Some additional discussion concerned how much detail grantees should include in Final Reports, given that the reports will now be published on the AHRQ NRC Web site. AHRQ suggested that grantees should discuss their Final Reports with their program officials to ensure that they find the right balance between summary information and research created for publication in peer-review publications.