

Seven Guidelines for PCN Messaging Tool Introduction

The purpose of this tool is to outline the key elements of Positive Community Norms Message Development and Design. The below Video and PDF go through the Seven Guidelines of PCN Message Development and provide best practices regarding PCN Message Design.

The Seven Guidelines for PCN Messaging Tool includes:

1. Seven Guidelines for PCN Messaging Tool Introduction: This is the document you are reading right now.
2. Seven Guidelines for PCN Messaging Checklist: This provides an explanation of the 7 guidelines with a question under each guideline to ‘check’ that the concept has been addressed.
3. Seven Guidelines for PCN Messaging Video: [This video](#) is an explanation of how to use the checklist for PCN message development.



Seven Guidelines for PCN Messaging checklist:

1. **Positive.** Your messages should promote what is good and healthy in your focus population. They should be positive, hope-based, healthy, and not fear or shame-based.

___ Is media positive, hope-based, healthy, legal and not fear or shame-based?

2. **Normative.** Technically, a normative statistic is anything over 50%. However, people in your community are unlikely to be happy if you tell them that 51% of youth do not drink alcohol regularly. Remember that some norms are stronger than others; use your best numbers in your messages. Your messages should convey a positive norm.

___ Does the media promote and cite a healthy norm in the community?

3. **Reflective.** Mirror your focus population's best behavior back to them in a way that is designed to change misperceptions. Avoid being prescriptive, preachy, or autocratic. The images and language should reflect the focus audience, and the area in which they live, work, or go to school. This may mean the wording used for students is different than that used for parents.

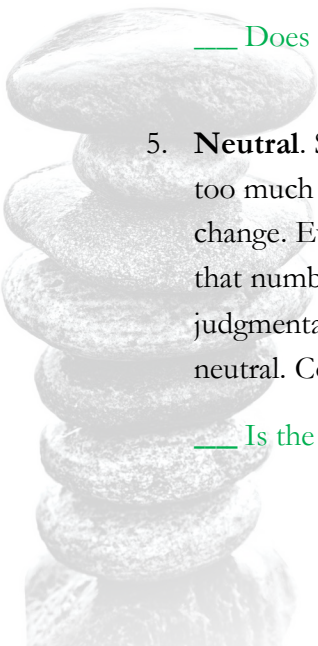
___ Do the images and language reflect and relate to the focus audience?

4. **Inclusive.** Create messages that speak to the diversity of your focus population. In addition, make sure your messages do not exclude members of your focus audience (e.g., those students who do drink).

___ Does the media make members of the focus audience feel like they are included?

5. **Neutral.** State statistics and facts in a nonjudgmental tone. Embracing strong norms with too much enthusiasm can create the impression that you do not see a need for further change. Even if 90% of the people in your focus population do not drive while impaired, that number can be improved upon. Avoid eliciting psychological reactance by being judgmental. Some agencies or peer groups are perceived as having an agenda and not being neutral. Consequently, you must strive to convey the perception of neutrality.

___ Is the media based on fact and presented in a non-judgmental tone?



6. **Clear.** Keep your messages short and simple. Be as straightforward as possible. The audience should be able to understand and repeat one big idea from each message. Make sure to emphasize “never” or “don’t” when using these words in print materials. Often people -- anticipating the types of messages they are used to seeing -- actually skip over these essential words. Make sure your norms message is front and center, and isn’t bogged down by a lot of additional information.

___ Are the messages simple and easy to understand? Is the norms message the most prominent message?

7. **Data-based and source-specific.** Truth and accuracy are central to your PCN campaign. The data source should be an integral part of every message. Print at the bottom of the page should be legible because it provides credibility. Your materials should be supported by all of the relevant details about the data, such as:

- The age range of the respondents (Example: 7-12th graders)
- The response rate or number of respondents (Example: n=1345 students)
- Relevant definitions, i.e. "70% of students do NOT use alcohol regularly, (regular use: once a month or more)"
- The time frame to which the data refers (such as the year the data was collected)
- The actual data source such as the survey name and/or evaluator

___ Have the numbers been double-checked? Is a source included along with a 'Funded by' citation?

