



BCEOHRN Communications Strategy 2008

Recommendations and Actions

Summary



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October, 2007**

Recommendations, Actions and Timelines

Objective:

- To become known as the primary environmental, occupational and health research network in BC.
- To become known as the major facilitator in cooperative environmental and occupational health research grants.

Key Messages:

- BCEOHRN actively supports researchers in the environmental and occupational health fields with concrete tools and networking opportunities
- BCEOHRN offers these opportunities to encourage researchers to work together and collaborate on grant applications.

Notes:

Because BCEOHRN's funding is incremental, it is impossible to develop a long-term communications strategy. However, items outlined here will add value in the short term, and are a solid first step for future planning.

Next steps will be influenced by the results of the member survey, but there are two key areas that can be acted upon immediately.

Overarching communications messaging, strategy and use of communications tools

1. Begin clearly identifying BCEOHRN mandate and purpose in every communication
2. Develop new and improve existing collateral and communications tools
3. Highlight successes and value of membership through profiles of members

Membership support

4. Recruit members to maintain current membership levels
5. Promote benefits
6. Position BCEOHRN as having unique value to students and new researchers

Overarching Communications messaging, strategy and use of communications tools

1. Clearly articulate BCEOHRN mandate in every communication

The Network does not explicitly state its key function – to facilitate more collaborative research projects across British Columbia. This key message should consistently be front and centre of every piece of communication produced by the network – the front page of the website, in the masthead of newsletters, membership packages, email signature lines, and at all conferences and workshops.

Recommendation: Develop a succinct tagline (e.g. *Building better research in B.C.*) for consistent use all communications materials: newsletters, membership packages, website, workshop and event packages, etc.

Action and Responsibility: Pat Atherton to coordinate a brainstorming committee to develop taglines options. A communications advisor can facilitate the discussion, and the recommendation should be presented to the Board of Directors for decision.

Timeline: Informal committee struck by Apr. 1, hold one brainstorming session via conference call / Webex seminar. Proposals to the board of Directors for decision in May.

2. Develop new and improve existing collateral and communications tools

Currently, BCEOHRN has a website and distributes a newsletter, a member benefits document and workshop and event programs. All collateral should be redesigned to have a consistent look/feel, creating and reinforcing the BCEOHRN identity and brand. Since the web design is almost complete, new templates will follow that look/feel. The Network's mandate of facilitating collaborative research will be highlighted in each tool.

- The **newsletter's** function needs to be clearly defined: in the past, a simple Word-formatted document it was distributed to update members on Network activities. The most recent Newsletter (May 2007) was a radical departure from that format – a six page, full-colour print document covering sessions at the Spring Workshop.

All newsletters should be written in a consistent template and reflect the key objectives (raising awareness of the Network among researchers, and actively promote collaborative research applications). Two newsletters would be produced each year, spring and fall. Content would include:

- a Success story profiling members using the benefits to support their research, and ultimately, collaboratively apply for and receive a research grant;
- a Spotlight story on one member benefit and how it has helped a member;

- a high-level overview of the most recent workshop or AGMs, or look ahead at planning for upcoming workshop;
 - and brief note from the Scientific Director updating members on achievements, new activities and benefits, etc.
- The network needs a professional, adaptable **member benefits brochure** template. It will be updated regularly as new benefits are added and featured, and printed on demand (200-300 per) for distribution at events and workshops or possible membership drives. The most recent version will be available for download on the website, in PDF format.
 - **Event and workshop registration and program** packages also need consistent branding. A template consistent with other materials will reinforce the BCEOHRN brand.
 - **Visual display** for workshops and events. Banners up are vertical displays that are easy to carry and assemble. A banner up at the registration table would help participants quickly identify the BCEOHRN event, and consistency with collateral material available nearby (member benefits brochure, most recent newsletter, event program) would reinforce BCEOHRN identity and key message (collaborative research).
 - **Website** content should be reviewed upon acceptance of communications strategy (in part or whole) to ensure all pages reflect intention of Board of Directors and clearly promotes key messages.

Action and Responsibility: Once website rebuild is completed and look/feel is determined, Pat Atherton to negotiate with North Studio to extend BCEOHRN branding to print products (newsletter, Member Benefits brochure, event and workshop program templates) and Banner UP.

Timeline: April-May

3. **Profile successes and value of membership through profiles of members**

Nothing encourages like success stories. After operating for two years, BCEOHRN should be able to identify success stories at many levels – from how BCEOHRN benefits (databases, networking, mentoring, workshops, groups) helped individuals with research, to the story behind the first successful collaborative grant application.

Action and Responsibility: Board of Directors to actively identify potential volunteers to tell their stories. Set aside time at quarterly board meetings to brainstorm names of members who might be approached for their participation. Once members have been contacted and expressed interest in participating, the newsletter editor will follow up with a story for

use in the newsletter and on the website. Pullout quotes can be used in member-benefits brochure and future collateral.

Timeline: Board of Directors to hold a brainstorming discussion at May meeting. Story to be included in Spring and Fall (2008) newsletters.

Membership

4. Recruit members to maintain current membership levels;

The board of directors is relatively satisfied with the level of membership. While there is no need to actively “grow” the membership, the Network must replace members who move on and be open and inviting to new researchers interested in joining. The network should continue to promote Membership on website and in newsletter.

Action and Responsibility:

- Pat Atherton to ensure Member Benefit pages on website should have an “Email this page to a friend” button as part of website rebuild
Timeline: end of May 2008.
- Pat Atherton to encourage recipients to “forward this [bi-weekly] email to a colleague in environment occupational health or health research.”
Timeline: ASAP
- Board of Directors to identify BCEOHRN validators to promote the value of the network. Quotes to be used in newsletter, website, brochures and event programs to highlight value of the Network.
Timeline: This could be done as a brainstorming part of the Board of Directors meeting in May, Stories ready for Newsletter – Spring and Fall 2008.

5. Promote benefits

BCEOHRN benefits are specifically designed to encourage collaborative research. All communications to promote benefits should reinforce that point.

Action and Responsibility:

- Spotlight one benefit in each newsletter. It can be a new benefit, a benefit that is not well used, or a benefit that members are successfully using.
Timeline: Spring 2008
- Dedicate one page on the website to tools available to members – there should be a brief description of each tool, focusing on how it supports collaborative research. Encourage members to “Bookmark this page” to use as their entry to the BCEOHRN website.
Timeline: as new website is being built, for launch end of November 2008.
- Develop membership benefits template that can be easily updated as new benefits are added. Print as required for workshops, meetings, etc. Post on website for download and print.
Timeline: TBD

6. Position BCEOHRN as having unique value to students and new researchers.

Students and new researchers are well positioned to achieve the Network goal of collaborating on research applications. The Network provides access to tools and resources that new researchers might not have easy access to. As well, unlike many senior researchers who have established funding, junior researchers may have more appetite to work collaboratively on applications.

Action and Responsibility:

- Benefits should be promoted specifically for students and new researchers. These include the opportunity to get to know and work with senior researchers, access to mentoring, access to research tools and the opportunity to gain experience and profile in the community by volunteering with BCEOHRN. This also builds capacity for BCEORHN and could become a board recruitment tool. A special “student” membership brochure can be distributed through post secondary institutions, and posted on the Membership section of the website.

Timeline: TBD based on consultation.

- Using member database, tailor messages specifically to students and new researchers to reinforce messages around collaboration.

Timeline: TBD

- Feature “New Researchers” in newsletter

Timeline: TBD

Strategic relationships

7. Build relationships communications shops from post-secondary and other research institutions.

Communication shops at post-secondary institutions could be a valuable resource for BCEOHRN. They will actively promote achievements of researchers in their institutions, and have established relationships with media interested in academic, scientific and research stories. When BCEOHRN members succeed in landing a collaborative grant, it would be beneficial to have an established relationship with communications shops.

Actions:

- Invite communications staff from post secondary institutions near a workshop to attend presentations and meet Network members/directors.
- Work with other Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research networks on a joint “introduction” to post secondary institutions in the province. This could be a letter, email or conference call with Communications Directors, or a BCEOHRN presence at relevant conferences. Topic would be “Working together better.”

8. Research Users: Workers Compensation Board, Health etc.

Twenty-four per cent of BCEOHRN members are research users, who may not have a clear idea of their role or expectations of their participation. The

possibility of a research user championing an application might encourage more researchers to collaborate on a specific project.

Actions:

- BCEOHRN could draft a guide for research users (e.g. *BC Environment and Occupational Health Network: How We Can Help*) for posting to website or as part of an outreach campaign. This would position the network as knowing what projects members are working on, and showing an active commitment to facilitating communication between researchers and users.

Timeline: TBD

- Coordinated Outreach to organizations: Scientific Director, Board of Directors to identify key stakeholders and meet with them. Would need to define key messages and develop *How We Can Help* collateral.

Timeline: TBD

9. Employers

BCEOHRN (and all MSFHR HoPN) should be on the radar of members' employers. Not only do they validate the Network's value to researchers, but can be a key support to the Network. Currently, 33 per cent of members work at UBC, and the Network's finances are managed by UNBC. These will raise the Network's profile with researchers in each institution, and could be a model for building relationships with other post secondary institutions around British Columbia.

Actions:

- TBD