

# POWER OF COMMUNICATION PART 3

Rural Communication and Media  
Relations - Building Trust Before  
the Crisis



# Learning Objectives

- Analyze the role of the media as a partner within the rural public health ecosystem
- Outline the essential components of a media response process, even in organizations without a formal Public Information Officer (PIO)
- Differentiate between appropriate spokesperson roles and subject matter expert contributions
- Evaluate potential risks associated with informal or “off the record” communications
- Describe how to apply rural-specific messaging principles to a public health communication scenario
- Develop one documented action step to strengthen media preparedness in their organization

**The media is part of the public health  
system**

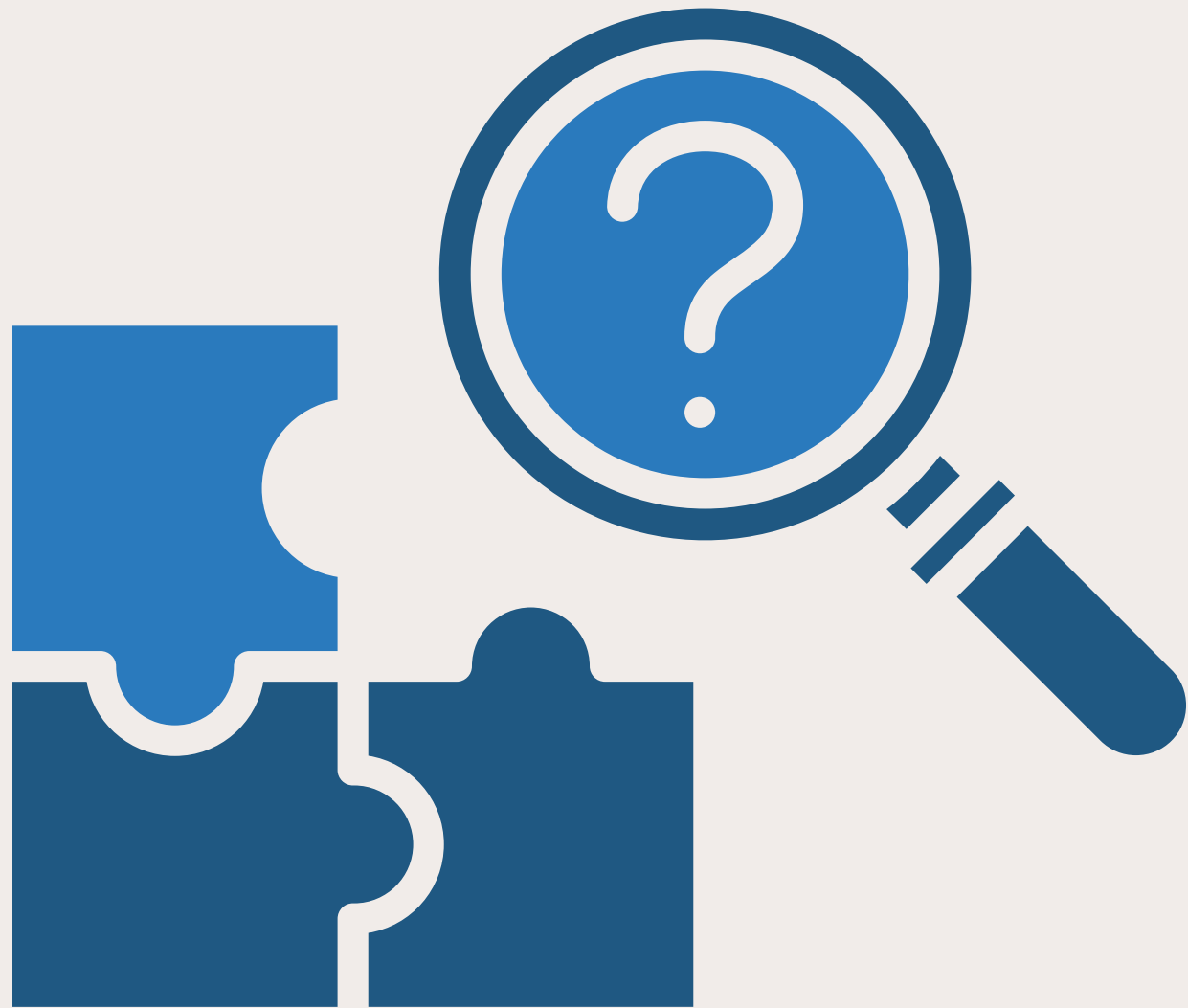


# Trusted Allies



- Help disseminate accurate information
- Reduce rumor spread
- Amplify prevention messages

# Weak Relationships

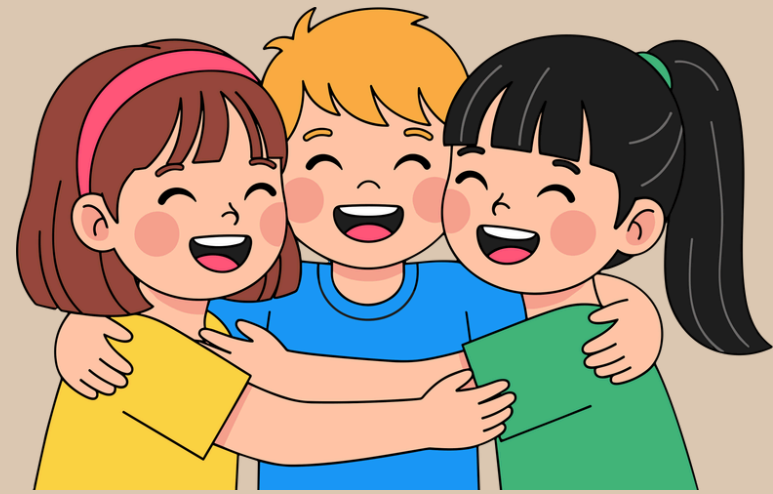


- Narrative Gaps
- Assumptions
- Misconceptions

# Rural Reality Check



Public health  
leaders wear  
multiple hats



Media may be  
friends or  
acquaintances



Information  
spreads  
quickly



Crisis is part of  
the reality in  
public health



# Building Relationships

- Invite reporters to learn about the health department
- Share the positive work of the health department regularly
- Offer information about the skills and accomplishments of staff
- Ask about their processes and pressure
- Share your established process/flow for media inquiries

# **Every Local Health Department Needs a Clear Media Relations Process**

Clear  
Spokesperson

Defined Chain  
of Response

Clear and  
Simple Protocol

Designated  
Source of  
Approval

# REFLECTION

Take 3-5 minutes to reflect on these questions. Write down your thoughts - we will build on this later.

- Who in your organization answers the phone?
- What would they say if a reporter calls right now?
- Do they know who to transfer to or what process to use to redirect the call?

A hand-drawn checklist with four items, each consisting of a checked box and two horizontal lines for notes.



# The Spokesperson

- Who is the established spokesperson?
- When do they defer to subject matter experts?
- Who serves as backup?
- What is the after-hours protocol?

# “Off the Record” Realities



- Rarely truly off the record
- Anything shared may be published
- Text messages and emails are public record in many states
- Emotional reactions in interviews can shape narratives

# Discipline Over Defensiveness

- Practice the “Pause” before responding
- Use a firm but calm tone
- Ask for questions in advance when possible
- Bridge back to key messages
- Avoid speculation, blame, or personal opinions
- Stay in your lane of expertise


# Use Bridging Language



**“What we know right now is..”**

**“Our priority remains..”**

**“We’re continuing to assess..”**

The background is a solid teal color with a pattern of concentric, overlapping ripples that resemble water. A central point of focus is a small, intricate, flower-like or mandala-like pattern. Several smaller, isolated ripple patterns are scattered across the teal background.

**Credibility =  
Consistency + Calm**

# Common Rural Considerations



- Distrust of government or outside authority
- Political polarization
- Strong interpersonal networks
- Broadband limitations
- Privacy concerns
- Workforce shortages
- Cultural values - independence
- Stigma (mental health, SUD..)

# Tailoring Rural Messaging



- Use trusted voices
- Lead with shared values
- Normalize help-seeking
- Avoid jargon
- Provide clear confidentiality assurance
- Identify and involve local networks

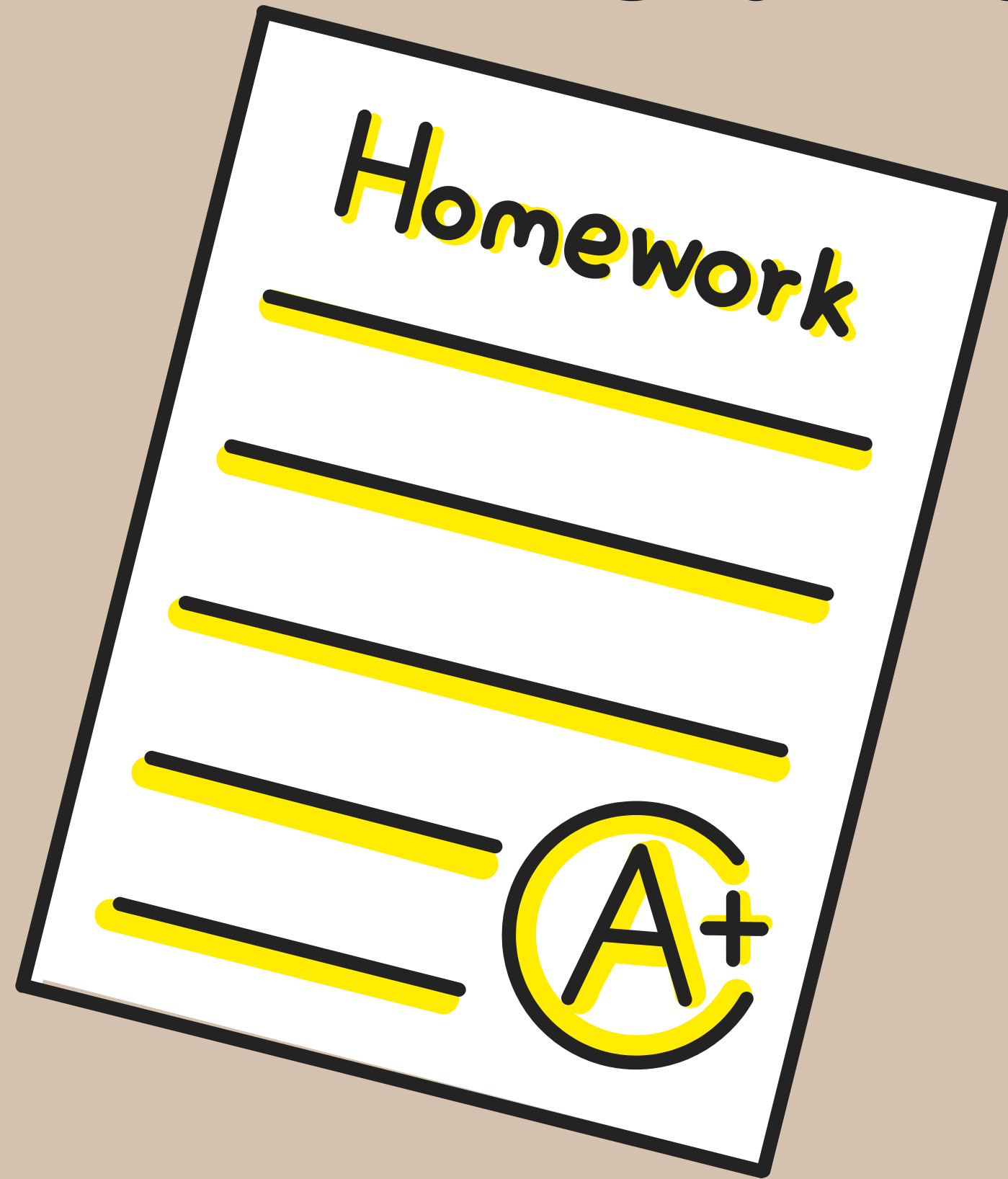
A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding three light-colored wooden blocks stacked vertically. The top block features a large, bold, black letter 'Q'. The middle block features a large, bold, black ampersand '&'. The bottom block features a large, bold, black letter 'A'. The background is softly blurred, showing a wooden surface and a white ceramic bowl. The lighting is warm and natural, highlighting the texture of the wood and the skin of the hand.

**Q**

**&**

**A**

# Rural Media Response Template



- Review the template
- Complete the areas where you already have steps in place
- Make note of the areas where you have gaps and consider what you could add (steps, assignments, new policy, etc.)
- Bring your completed protocol to the workshop



**Anchor it - what has been  
most helpful today?  
Leave it in the chat!**

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