Consortium of Universities for Global Health

FROM EVIDENCE TO IMPACT

Science Communication for Global Health Professionals

The Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) offers a toolkit to assist global health professionals in communicating more effectively about their work. These resources are aimed at scientists, researchers, students, faculty, and others, who want to maximize their impact by engaging the news media, telling stories and writing persuasively, and countering mis- and disinformation. You can access each resource individually or download the content as a single PDF toolkit.

The toolkit includes tip sheets to help you (1) pitch your work to journalists and prepare for an interview; (2) use storytelling, op-eds, and other persuasive communications techniques; and (3) challenge mis- and disinformation and build trust in science and health. You will also find a corresponding resource list to learn more and go deeper on any of these topics.

This toolkit was compiled from two CUGH workshops led by health and science journalists and experts in the field of mis- and disinformation. A sample agenda from the September 2026 workshop is included, along with an event overview and participant reflections.

Who is this for?

- Global health faculty, staff, and educators
- Students in public health, medicine, nursing, and other health sciences
- Scientists, health researchers, and early-career investigators
- Health providers and practitioners
- Staff at NGOs, ministries, and other global health organizations

Included in the toolkit:

- Tip Sheet: Storytelling & Persuasive Communications
- Tip Sheet: Engaging the Media
- Tip Sheet: Addressing Mis/Disinformation
- Additional Resources
- About the Evidence to Impact Workshop

If you're interested in learning more about holding a *From Evidence to Impact* science communication workshop, please contact the CUGH team at: events@cugh.org.



Acknowledgements

The content in this toolkit are drawn from the lectures, presentations, and resources shared by the journalists and experts who led the *From Evidence to Impact* workshops. We are grateful to Vinay Kampalath at the University of Pennsylvania and the CUGH Research Committee; Brian W. Simpson, journalist and workshop moderator; Jon Cohen of *Science*; documentary filmmaker Molly Knight Raskin; Sean Hamill, formerly of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*; journalist Marc Sandalow former Washington Correspondent for the *San Francisco Chronicle*; and Tara Kirk Sell of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. CUGH condensed their advice, examples, and recommended readings, with permission and full credit to each contributor. The September 2026 workshop was held as part of a Pulitzer Center U.S. Civil Society Microgrant.



TIPS FOR TELLING THE STORY OF YOUR RESEARCH

The power—and science—of storytelling

Human beings are wired to respond to stories. The brain of someone listening to a story will sync up with the storyteller, making storytelling a powerful and persuasive tool for scientists, researchers and global health professionals. Stories in a narrative format build more compassion, can change attitudes and spur curiosity more than hard data and facts alone.

Pair a data point with a human story to amplify your results

Most scientists are trained to convey results and data but not to communicate the findings through storytelling. Data and a human voice together work better to ensure that a scientist's study goes beyond the journal and translates to change in practice, policy, or public opinion.

Story rocket fuel

Details, surprise, quotes and brevity. Write it down, say it aloud, cut what isn't essential, and test it on a colleague or friend.



Know what you want your audience to know, feel, and do

A strategic story is not just interesting. It is built to move a specific audience toward a specific goal. Before you start, decide what you want listeners to **know**, what you want them to **feel**, and what you want them to **do**.

Four steps to a story

- **Setting:** provide details of the where and when, set the scene for the listener.
- **Character:** anchor the story on a person, and individual that audience can picture, it could be a health worker, a patient, an every day person who is affected personally by the issue you're describing. The character in the story could be you.
- **Conflict:** You must give the listener conflict or the story will not land. The conflict can be old versus new, two personalities clashing over the central issue, or the character facing an uphill battle or doubt.
- **Meaning:** Tell and show the audience by it matters and what it could mean if progress was made, typically as a result of that scientific break through or developing a new way of working.

Finding the story in your research

- **Start with the why of your work:** Was there a turning point or setback? A personal moment that made you want to tackle this issue?
- **Pick a protagonist.** Pick one person inside the system, for example a health worker or government official, and talk about their quest to change the system and why.
- **Be honest about the results.** Do not force a happy ending or results that have not come through yet. End on a vivid picture of what success looks like and why it is urgent.
- **Distill it into one sentence** that shows the arc. If you can't, the story isn't ready.

Writing for advocacy: using op-eds and letters to make your case

Even the most compelling research or effective health program does not automatically translate to public support or improved policies. You can play an important role in scaling your impact by drawing in supporters, engaging your community, and making a call to action to policy makers. Writing an Op-ed is one one way to do that. A 2018 Yale study found that Op-Eds are "an effective means for changing people's minds," with "large and long-lasting effects."

What makes an op-ed work

- **A compelling, focused topic.** Choosing it is the most important decision.
- **A strong beginning.** If your first sentence doesn't grab readers, they'll never reach the second.
- **A clear call to action.** You've shared important information — what should readers do with it?
- **No "blah-blah."** If it repeats what experts have already said, it won't be published, or read.

Four ways to begin

- **Bold:** a direct claim that stakes out your position.
- **Personal:** a moment from your own life or work.
- **Surprising:** a perspective the reader doesn't expect.
- **Descriptive:** a scene the reader can see.

A simple structure

1. **Beginning** — grab the reader
2. **Call to action** — what needs to happen
3. **Supporting points** — data, a personal story, history, expert voices
4. **Call to action again** — stronger, now that you've made the case
5. **Closer**

Strengthen it by acknowledging the weaknesses in your argument, answering your opponents, and painting the future you want.

A properly timed op-ed can move a field forward

In Feb. 2020, infectious disease expert Arturo Casadevall wrote a 600-word op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* proposing convalescent plasma for COVID-19.

Within days, $4 million in grants were offered; within six months, about 100,000 people had been treated.

Letters to the editor

A faster, shorter option: respond within **48 hours** of the article, stay under the outlet's limit (often **250 words**), state your position plainly, and give one or two local examples. Include your title and affiliation.

Write in plain language

Write so a non-specialist understands you on first read. Minimize jargon or anything too technical or industry-specific. Write in sentences, and explain any term you can't avoid.

Tell it responsibly

Use other people's stories with respect and permission, tell them in ways that help a community rather than hurt individuals, and stay true to the data.

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TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA

Prepare your pitch to a journalist

Most journalists want to talk to you. With a little research you can make it easy for them to respond and want to interview you about your work.

- **Show you know their work.** Specifically, not generically — name the piece you read.
- **Connect your work to their beat.** Say why your research intersects with what they already cover.
- **Say why it's a story.** Is it interesting, or is it significant? It doesn't need to be both, but know which one you're leading with. It can be both!
- **Offer a key takeaway to pique their interest.** Try to develop one sentence that captures a key point of the research in language a reader would understand.

Do your homework on the journalist and prepare for the interview

Do background on the journalist by reading their recent work, know who they write for and what angle they tend to take. Expect them to ask questions in a skeptical and curious way, seeking to learn what is new or significant about your work.

Come prepared for the interview by writing down exactly what you want to say. Keep these key points with you during the interview to keep you focused if the questions go in a different direction. Think about your research or your programmatic work, and write down:

- **Three things you want to get across,** one plain sentence each. If you don't choose them, the interview will choose for you.
- **Three things you'll need to correct,** and how you'll correct each in the moment. A rehearsed correction sounds calm; an improvised one sounds defensive.
- **One quote-ready sentence** that captures the key finding.

Understand on-the-record, off-the-record, and on background

If you have information that you want to share with a journalist, but are not comfortable being quoted or identified, you should discuss this directly at the start of the conversation.

Journalists will protect your identity as a source; this is a core professional norm, not a favor. Agree explicitly what "on background" or "off the record" means before you share anything. If you're weighing this, talk to the journalist about source protection first. Most professional journalists will work with you to negotiate an agreement that you are both comfortable with.

Know your organization's policy about engaging with the media

Research your institution's policies that describe how staff can speak to the press before you start a conversation with a journalist. A few items to understand include:

- What requires communications sign-off, and what doesn't
- Whether you can speak in a personal capacity, and how to say so clearly
- What your funder agreements say about public comment

During the interview, you are the expert

A few general tips to remember during any interview with a journalist:

- Lead with your key point, then the caveat — not the reverse
- Try to provide one idea per sentence; this helps journalist find a "quote"
- Silence is fine. Do not rush, it's better to think and pause before answering
- If a question rests on a wrong premise, correct the premise first
- If you misspeak, say so and restate it cleanly

Quote vs. information

Everything you say during an interview is either meant to (1) convey information or (2) serve as a quote. Most of what you say is **information**, meant to provide context, caveats, and background information to help the journalist understand your work and get the story correct. During the course of the conversation, you might provide a **quote**, which is a memorable sentence that captures a key point of the research and can stand alone on the page.

Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."

If you don't know, say so. It's OK. It protects your credibility, and it beats a guess that has to be walked back later. Offer to follow up, or point them to someone who does know.

Using statistics to counter misinformation

Numbers and data are one of your strongest tools for correcting a false claim and countering misinformation and challenging skeptics. It is often most effective to choose a data point that helps convey the human impact of your research and the health / science topic.

Tips to correct information during an interview

When you need to challenge or correct something that a journalist says, you can do so in a way that is direct but non-confrontational. You can start at a place where you have common ground and respectfully share evidence to support your case.

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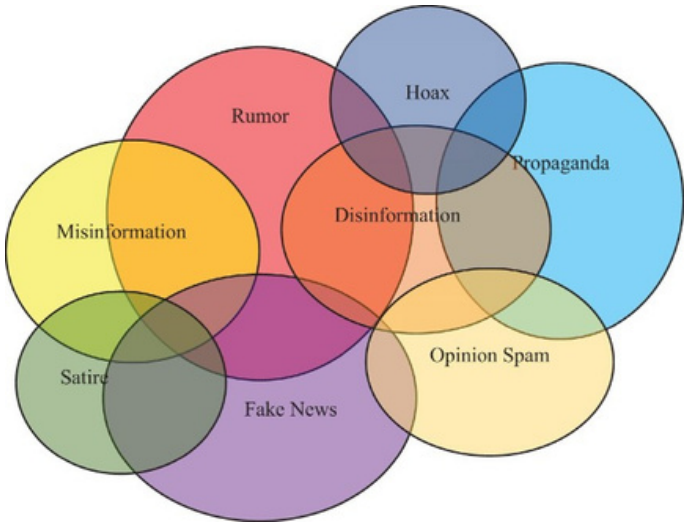


TIPS FOR ADDRESSING MIS- & DISINFORMATION

Understand the information space today

With growing digitization, information can spread more rapidly - causing an **infodemic**. This can help to more quickly fill information voids, but can also amplify harmful messages and make it difficult for people to differentiate between false and true information.

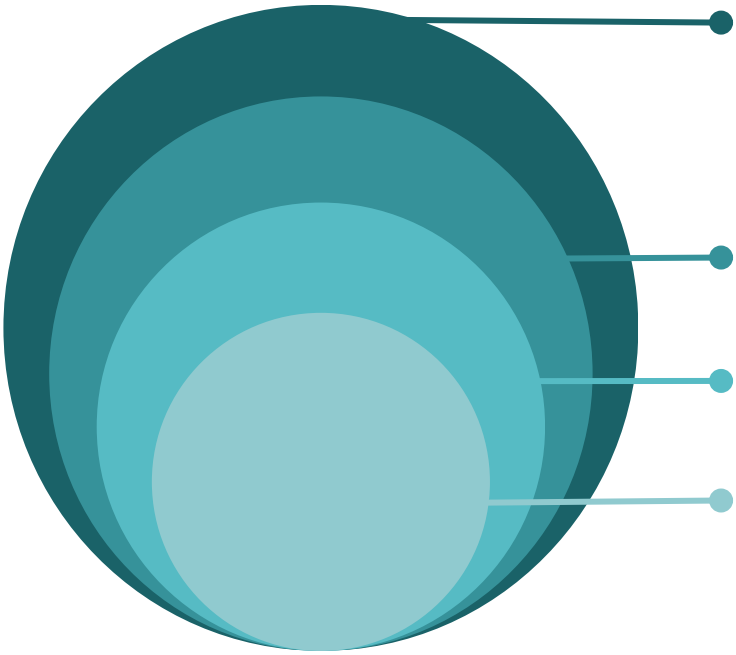
Misinformation is the spread of false information without the intent to mislead. **Disinformation** is designed or spread with full knowledge of it being false, as part of an intention to deceive and cause harm. The motivations may be political, financial, or social. **The key difference is not the content of the falsehood, but the knowledge and intention of the sender.**



Meel P, Vishwakarma DK. Fake news, rumor, information pollution in social media and web: A contemporary survey of state-of-the-arts, challenges and opportunities. Expert systems with applications. 2020 Sep 1;153:112986.

Know the different infodemic management strategies

The 4i Framework for Advancing Communication and Trust (4i FACT) comprises four levels, each containing interventions to manage health mis- and disinformation.



Institutional / Structural

- Resources and standards for journalists and fact-checkers
- Managing academic/scientific literature
- Resources for infodemic researchers/research
- Resources for infodemic managers
- Social media content policies
- Policy/legislation

Interpersonal / Community

- Resources for public health communicators
- Community engagement

Individual

- Enhancing information literacy
- Prebunking/inoculation

Information

- Amplifying factual information
- Filling information voids
- Debunking false information
- Information tracking
- Verification, credibility, and detection

Sundelson AE, Jamison AM, Huhn N, Pasquino SL, Sell TK. Fighting the infodemic: the 4 i Framework for Advancing Communication and Trust. BMC Public Health. 2023;23(1):1662. doi:10.1186/s12889-023-16612-9

Set yourself up for success by preparing for health related rumors

- **Identify 'prework'** such as keeping track of which actions helped address rumors in the past and identify strategic actions for the future.
- **Put together a multidisciplinary team** who can address rumors in a quick and coordinated way that is supported by your institution or organization's leadership.
- **Connect and build community partnerships,** such as working with partners that already have strong communication platforms and have earned community trust.
- **Get to know your audience** and adjust messages to meet their unique needs.
- **Set up ways to identify rumors using social listening tools,** such as monitoring comment sections in relevant media platforms.

Many rumors do not warrant a response

You will need to consider all influencing factors together to decide if you should take action to address rumors. Sometimes, not acting is the best decision. **Consider the following questions when deciding whether to act:**

- What is your goal?
- How serious is the rumor?
- Do you have the capacity to respond?
- Are there negative consequences of responding?
- Which conditions immediately trigger action?

If action is decided, know the various approaches

There are many ways to approach rumors, some require more resources than others:

- Amplify accurate information
- Fill information voids
- Leverage trusted messengers and engage communities
- Refute, fact-check, or debunk
- Prebunk and innoculate
- Improve health literacy

Key takeaways from the experts

- Anticipate loss of trust and spread of rumors - prepare!
- Ground communication in transparency and trust
- Be willing to say "we don't know"

Match messages to the motivations of audiences

You can guide audiences toward receiving messages in intended ways by framing them strategically.

- **Moral:** align messages with your target audiences' motivations and moral values
- **Gain:** focus on desirable outcomes or benefits to the audience
- **Self-oriented:** appeal to self-serving benefits
- **Promotion:** appeal to improving a positive outcome during crisis
- **Prevention:** appeal to preventing a negative outcome during non-crisis times
- **Health consequences:** appeal to health-related consequences of changing behavior

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Storytelling & Persuasive Communications

- Your Storytelling Superpower: The Why and How of Stories
- The Op-Ed Project
- Strategic Storytelling for Public Health Messengers: A Research-Based Toolkit
- Frameworks: The Storytelling Power of Numbers
- AGU: Letter to the Editor Tips & Worksheet
- The Global Health Network's Global Health Training Centre Tools for Scientific Dissemination
- The R3 Science Communications Leadership Webinars

Engaging with the Media & Policymakers

- CUNY Science Communication Toolkit: Media Engagement
- AAAS: Working with Journalists
- AGU: Scientists Guide to Working with the Media
- AGU: Tips for Meeting Policymakers & Worksheet

Misinformation & Disinformation

- Rumors, Trust, and Harassment in Public Health
- Practical Playbook for Addressing Health Rumors
- The Public Health Communicators Guide to Misinformation
- Fast Frames: Strategic Framing Under Pressure (Ep. 1) - Navigating Mis- & Dis-information
- PEN America: Trusted Messenger Guidebook
- The Trusted Messenger Program
- ICFJ Disarming Disinformation Program

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ABOUT THE EVIDENCE TO IMPACT WORKSHOP



“Human connection and storytelling are powerful tools for impact.”

-Participant reflection

On September 17-18, 2026 CUGH held *From Evidence to Impact: A Science Communication Workshop* in Washington, DC.

Over the course of the two-day event, graduate students, faculty, early-career investigators, and health care workers learned–and applied–techniques from award winning journalists to help them connect through stories, craft a compelling pitch to a reporter, and navigate the pitfalls of misinformation and disinformation that prevent science breakthroughs from reaching the people who need them the most.

Participants left the workshop with more confidence in their ability to write a persuasive article and talk about their work to a member of the media. They committed to taking a concrete action within the next 30 days to communicate about their work, such as writing an op-ed, reaching out and pitching a story to a journalist, or starting a blog or podcast.

For CUGH, *From Evidence to Impact* was just one step toward building a cadre of effective communicators in the health and science fields. CUGH will continue working with its members to ensure that communication skills are integrated into global health curricula and treated with the same importance as research skills.

“Journalists are invaluable partners to global health practitioners and researchers. Don’t discount their capacities as storytellers and our shared commitment to meaningful human impact.”

-Participant reflection



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GLOBAL HEALTH RESEARCHERS LEARN TO THINK LIKE JOURNALISTS?

With *Evidence to Impact*, CUGH begins building a cadre of global health researchers ready to be heard

September 17-18, 2026 | Washington, DC

Human brains are wired to respond to stories, but most health researchers are trained to lead with data. At *Evidence to Impact*, CUGH's two-day science communication workshop, researchers learned to combine the two, practicing how to turn their own findings into pitches and stories that journalists, policymakers, and the public will act on. The workshop, held September 17 and 18 in Washington, DC, with support from the Pulitzer Center, grew out of a successful CUGH 2026 pre-conference and paired graduate students, faculty, early-career investigators, and health care workers with award-winning science journalists.

Award winning journalists share experiences covering global and local health and sciences stories and offer advice on how to combine science with human interest.

“Your work matters, and the stories you tell make a difference,” documentary filmmaker Molly Knight Raskin, told participants, while also sharing examples from her recent work reporting on the human impact of cuts to USAID, as told by people who lost access to local clinics and medications in rural Ghana. Data and a human voice together work better than either one alone.

Over the course of the two-day event, graduate students, faculty, early-career investigators, and health care workers learned–and applied–techniques to help them connect through stories, craft a compelling pitch to a reporter, and navigate the pitfalls of misinformation and disinformation that prevent science breakthroughs from reaching people who need them the most.

In small groups, the researchers and health practitioners worked to develop opinion articles and story ideas based on their current work, and the journalist facilitators drew out the most salient points that should go into a pitch or interview with a reporter.

In small groups, health researchers and practitioners practiced pitching their work and receiving feedback from peers and journalists to improve their narrative.

Read the full workshop recap here.

SAMPLE AGENDA

DAY 1 | SCIENCE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Morning Sessions

- Participant arrival and check-in
- Welcome and introductions
- Opening scene-setter
- Panel session: effective communication skills and evidence-informed communication strategies

Afternoon Sessions

- Small group sessions: foundational learning
- Summary of the day
- Participant reflections and feedback

Example skills areas for small groups:

- Storytelling and persuasive communications
- Engaging with the media
- Engaging with policymakers
- Using new media

DAY 2 | ADDRESSING MIS- & DISINFORMATION

Morning Sessions

- Day 1 recap and reflections
- Panel session: misinformation and disinformation in global health
- Small group sessions: applied learning

Afternoon Sessions

- Small group sessions: applied learning
- Summary of the day
- Closing remarks and reflections
- Participant evaluations

Example skills areas for small groups:

- Storytelling and persuasive communications
- Engaging with the media
- Engaging with policymakers
- Using new media

