FDA **U.S. FOOD & DRUG**
ADMINISTRATION

Influencers 101:

Best Practices and Practical Approaches for Public Health Campaigns

Lessons learned from tobacco prevention campaigns

Overview

Influencer marketing has been successfully used by commercial businesses and brands for decades to increase awareness, trust, and likability (Hudders et al., 2021). In recent years, influencer marketing spending experienced enormous growth with estimates of the global market exceeding $13 billion in 2021 (Statista, 2021). Influencers are particularly well suited to digital channels such as social media. As the number of social media users continues to grow, this approach is an increasingly promising option for disseminating health information (Gupta et al., 2021; Merchant et al., 2021). Recent research demonstrates that social media influencers are effective at increasing reach of and engagement with public health messages (Kostyginaet al., 2020). Although many public education campaigns and public health efforts have considered or even experimented with using influencers, few resources outline the practical considerations for public health practitioners and describe how to get started.

This resource guide is designed for public health practitioners who want to apply marketing strategies to their influencer program. Specifically, it is an introductory resource for individuals who want to launch an influencer program on social media or for those who are in the early stages of implementing a new influencer program on social media. It is not intended to be prescriptive in its recommendations nor to provide comprehensive instruction for achieving behavior change. This guide is designed to help readers initiate, design, implement, and assess an influencer program.

The guide is separated into three sections: preparation, implementation, and measurement. Examples, case studies, and best practices are provided from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Tobacco Products' (CTP) experience working with influencers on multiple tobacco prevention campaigns. Although the recommendations and examples are drawn from a tobacco prevention context, their lessons can be applied more broadly to public education campaigns on other topics.

Table 1: Guide Terminology

Term	Definition
Media	
Amplify/Amplification	Amplification refers to using different channels and media tactics (see "Tactic" below) to promote your content with the goal of increasing its reach and visibility.
Channel	A channel is the medium that delivers a message. Some common channels include social media, digital video, television, and out-of-home advertising (e.g., billboards), among others.
Following/Followers	Followers are the number of accounts that choose to see the content of a specific social media account.
Goal	A goal describes what an effort is aiming to achieve. When creating a goal, there should be a plan for assessing whether that goal has been achieved. For example, a goal could be to increase awareness about a public health issue.
Platform	A platform is the location where a message is delivered. For example, Instagram and TikTok are platforms within the social media channel.
Reach	Reach is the number of unduplicated people who have been exposed to your content. Reach may also be a measurement goal.
Strategy	A strategy is the "game plan" for how to achieve a goal(s). For example, using the goal above, a strategy could be to share your message on social media. Strategies provide the "why" for tactics.
Tactic	Tactics are discrete activities implemented to enact strategies and reach goals. For example, using the goal and strategy stated above, a tactic could be partnering with an influencer to post.
Brand Safety	Practices that are used to keep a brand separate from inappropriate content that could damage its reputation. For example, a campaign with a teen audience would not want to place their ads on a liquor store's website.
Public Education	
Audience Segment	An audience segment is a portion of your intended audience that has specific interests, characteristics, psychographics, demographics, use behavior, etc. For example, within the intended audience of teens who are at risk for smoking, there is an audience segment of teens who like playing online games.
Brand	The brand typically describes the identity of your campaign or effort. Brand guidelines can help define the visuals that make a brand recognizable and the personality that will evoke who and what your brand represents.
Campaign	A campaign is an organized, strategic effort that has a defined goal.
Content	Content is the image, video, text, or audio that the viewer receives. For example, the social media post that the viewer sees is the content.
Intended Audience	An intended audience is the defined group that your program wants to reach.
Messaging	Messaging is what a campaign or brand says to an intended audience. Messaging encompasses both what and how something is said.
Talent	Talent are actors and other people paid for their skills, such as acting and modeling. Although these individuals may have large social media followings, this is not the primary reason they are hired.
Measurement	
Comments	Comments can measure the number of people who responded to a post and/or "their receptivity to the post. Comments typically share users' thoughts about the content and can include text, emojis, memes, and gifs.
Engagement	Engagement captures interaction with social media. Traditional engagement metrics include likes, comments, and shares. Some platforms are releasing new ways of engaging with content, such as voting, swiping up, using a filter, or a mix of all these actions. The engagement rate is the proportion of times a post is engaged compared to the post's total number of impressions.
Engagement Rate	The engagement rate is the proportion of individuals who engage with a post compared to the impressions.
Impressions	Impressions measure the total number of times an ad is displayed to a user. This can be interpreted as the potential number of times a post is viewed.
Likes/Reactions	Likes/reactions measure the number of people who "liked" or "reacted" to a post. The "heart" button on Instagram or Facebook is an example of a reaction.
Shares	Shares measure the number of times the post was forwarded by users to other individuals. Social media platforms often allow users to share content online with their networks.
Video Views	Video views measure the number of times a video has been watched. Platforms define video views differently. Some platforms count a view as watching the video for at least 3 seconds (but not to completion).

Background and Acknowledgments

This resource guide was developed as a collaborative effort between staff within CTP's Office of Health Communication and Education (OHCE), Rescue Agency, and FCB New York (FCB) to share lessons learned and best practices. These insights are drawn from 8 years of experience using influencers in the office's tobacco prevention campaigns since 2014. We thank the many staff who contributed to improving and expanding FDA's tobacco prevention influencer programs over the years. Additionally, we would like to provide special acknowledgment and thank these FDA staff and contractors:*

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Preparation

What Is an Influencer?

An influencer is a person with a following beyond their personal friends and family who has the ability to impact others' decisions. This can be something as simple as buying a product or promoting a specific behavior or lifestyle. An influencer could be a recognizable celebrity, but could also be an up-and-coming author, local rap artist, lifestyle blogger, gamer, reality TV star, drag queen, etc. While influencers exist across media channels, this guide specifically focuses on social media influencers. Typically, social media influencers have reach (i.e., a notable social media following), impact (e.g., an ability to impact the decision-making of others), and a bond or relationship with their followers (Hudders et al., 2021). When utilized in public health campaigns, influencers can provide positive, powerful examples of health behaviors or beliefs in action. As we will explain in this guide, an influencer should not be viewed as a spokesperson for your organization. Rather, influencer programs should be viewed as any other media tactic that could be used within a communication plan.

Deciding if Influencers Are Right for Your Organization: Start With Your Goal

Prior to working with an influencer, it is important to outline an organization's goal(s) and consider if using influencers will be the best strategy for achieving that goal. An influencer might be right for an organization if there is a specific message to promote or action to demonstrate that can be amplified authentically through someone else's voice. There are some instances in which working with an influencer might not be right for an organization, including if an intended audience is not on social media or if little is known about an intended audience. For example, if an intended audience has not been defined, and their interests are largely unknown, it will be challenging to pinpoint an effective influencer to work with. To decide if working with an influencer is right for an organization's goals, start by asking these questions:

- What am I trying to achieve?
- What would my program want to promote? A new resource? A health fact?
- Who is my intended audience? What are their interests/values?
- Does my intended audience use social media? How do they use social media? What channels do they use? Do they engage with influencers?
- What types of messages and messengers are effective with my audience? For example, do they respond to humor? Fear appeals? Aspirational messages?
- How will I assess if I achieved my goals?

Some public health organizations decide to work with influencers because they can connect with audiences who may otherwise be out of reach. Influencers connect with their audiences over shared passions and/or characteristics. This might be a shared interest (such as cooking or sports) and/or demographic, geographic, or psychographic characteristics. Other times, organizations may work with influencers because they want to reach large numbers of people and raise awareness about a program or message and influencers with large numbers of followers help them spread the word. Lastly, organizations may work with influencers to build trust around a subject that is hard to communicate or to connect with a skeptical audience who distrusts mainstream sources of information. Other examples of common influencer marketing goals include:

- Increasing program, brand, or campaign awareness
- Promoting a new resource (e.g., a new e-cigarette cessation resource or a new website)
- Increasing engagement on social media
- Increasing your organization or brand's number of followers
- Increasing credibility or trust in an organization, brand, campaign, or message
- Improving attention to campaign message(s)
- Changing or influencing opinions on a topic
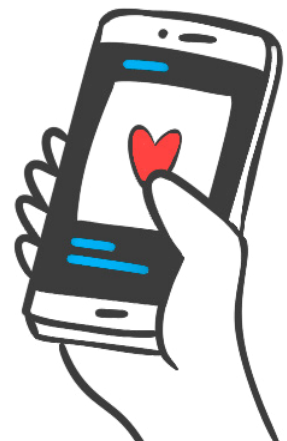
CASE STUDY

Partnering With Mega Influencer "Ninja" to Reach Teens

Launched in February 2014, *The Real Cost* campaign aims to prevent tobacco use among teens. The campaign is designed to provoke teens to rethink what they know about the costs of tobacco use and to snap them out of their "cost-free" mentality. *The Real Cost* is the federal government's first-ever national youth tobacco prevention campaign. This influencer program leveraged the influencer "Ninja" to raise awareness and encourage downloads of a new Xbox game, "One Leaves," developed by *The Real Cost* to educate teens about tobacco addiction. "Ninja"—a **mega influencer** in the gaming world—created a video where he played "One Leaves" and posted it on his YouTube channel. In the game, participants had to escape a haunted labyrinth, which was a metaphor for trying to escape cigarette addiction and the campaign message that three out of four teen smokers will remain smokers into adulthood. In the video, you can see "Ninja" playing the game and encouraging his 7 million followers to play the game, too. By leveraging an influencer like "Ninja" with a large following, we were able to increase visibility of the new game and deliver a call to action to download and play the "One Leaves" game to support the goal of increased exposure to the tobacco prevention message.
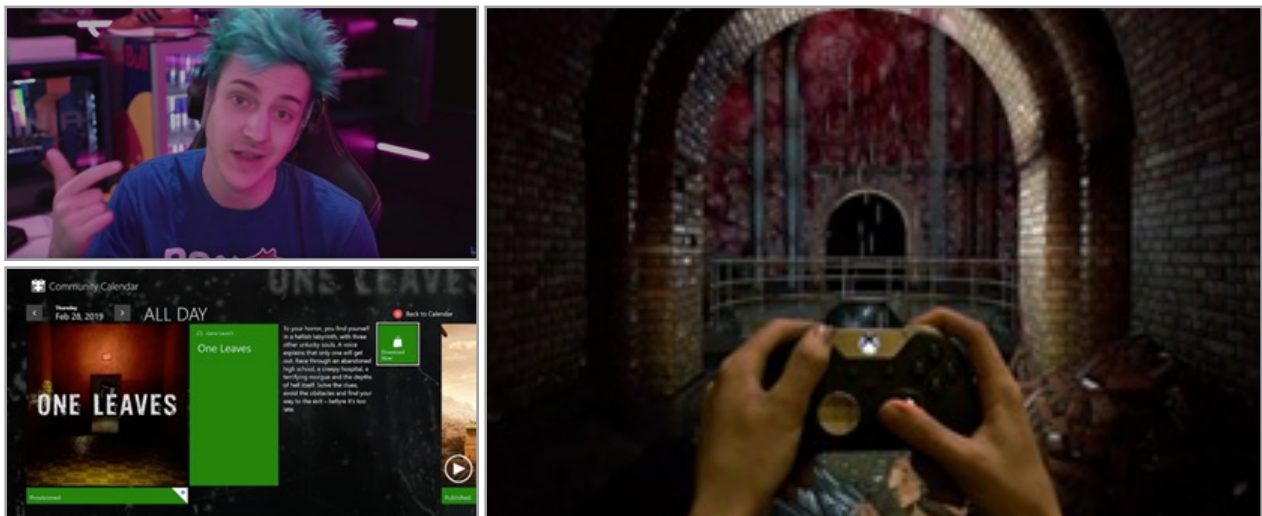
(top left) "Ninja" talking to camera in his YouTube video promoting "One Leaves"
(bottom left) an image demonstrating how to download the "One Leaves" game
(right) an example of actual gameplay
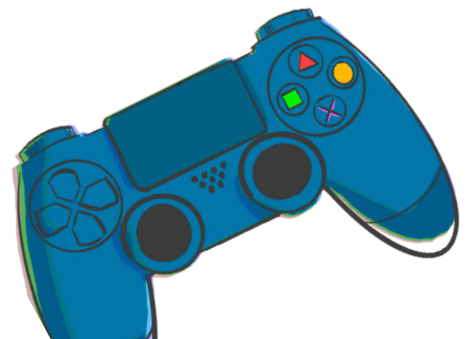
Categories of Influencers

There are five main categories of influencers (see Figure 1). These categories are primarily characterized by follower count (i.e., the total number of followers an influencer has), which also will determine the cost of working with an influencer (Geyser, 2022). Keep in mind, as an influencer's followers and popularity increase, the costs tend to grow, too. However, working within each influencer category can bring specific benefits to an organization. No matter your budget, it is possible to find the right influencer for your program's goals.

Figure 1: Influencer Categories

NANO
1K–10K Followers

Knows followers personally and has authentic relationships with them.

MICRO
10K–50K Followers

Have the ability to reach specialized communities around specific interests.

MID-SIZED
50K–500K Followers

Balance between specialized communities and reaching a larger audience.

MACRO
500K–1M Followers

Provide balance between cost and reaching a larger audience.

MEGA
1M+ Followers

Offers the largest and broadest reach.

It's important to note that no influencer category is more important or beneficial than another. Each category is useful for different reasons and should be selected based on a goal. If the goal is to reach a very niche audience through people who likely have more personal connections with their followers, it can be better to work with a nano or micro influencer. If the goal is to reach a larger audience with a modest budget, working with mid-sized influencers might be the best option for a campaign. With a higher budget, and a goal to reach as many people as possible, a campaign could work with a macro or mega influencer to disseminate a message.

Although there is no set pricing for working with influencers, generally an influencer's following dictates the cost of their services. It also depends on what they are asked to do and on which platform you would like to work with them. For example, campaigns may ask an influencer simply to share a predesigned message or they may be asked to create original unstructured content. Keep in mind that influencers may have a larger presence on certain platforms and thus may be more influential on one platform compared to another (e.g., Instagram vs. TikTok). Some platforms also tend to generate higher costs (e.g., the same influencer may cost more to work with on Instagram than on TikTok). Influencers can be leveraged on a single platform or across multiple platforms.

Negotiating cost may seem daunting because of the lack of standardization in the industry, but it's worth asking if they are willing to waive or lower their fees because your organization is a nonprofit or working on a topic for the greater good. Often, influencers who care about the topic will be willing to work at reduced cost, and this might be a sign that you've found the "right" influencer because they will come across more authentically to their audience on the topic.

Organizations often choose to work with influencers because of their followings and the opportunity to have content shared through the influencers' channels. However, there are other ways to engage with influencers that do not tap into their influence directly and may be less expensive. Organizations can work with influencers as as content creators or actors, so that their talent is the primary focus of the collaboration. For example, an animation artist may be a social media influencer, but an organization may choose to work with them because of their animation skills, so that the content requested is an animated message used on the organization's own channels without explicit acknowledgment of the influencer and without need of any stated sponsorship disclosures. The influencer's work may be recognized by the audience, but the main reason for collaboration is for their skill set and not to directly tap into their network.
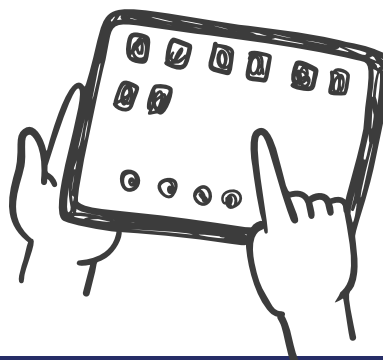
CASE STUDY

When to Use Nano Influencers, When to Use Mega Influencers

Fresh Empire was the first federal public education campaign designed to prevent and reduce tobacco use among at-risk multicultural youth ages 12–17 who identify with hip-hop culture, specifically African American, Hispanic, and Asian American and Pacific Islander youth. The *Fresh Empire* campaign used both nano and mega influencers for different purposes, as explained below.

Fresh Empire leveraged **nano influencers** (1k–10k followers) in key city hubs to increase campaign credibility and authenticity to ultimately increase engagement with the campaign's intended audience on social media and at live events. We selected influencers with a large number of local followers where the campaign was implemented. Influencers supported other media tactics by sharing branded content and posts with their immediate groups of friends and followers. Content included conversation starters to promote engagement (e.g., comments and shares) with a tobacco-free message and advertising for local events that the campaign was hosting in their area. The nano influencers would often attend the events and had personal relationships and connections with their followers, so they could authentically talk about living tobacco-free.
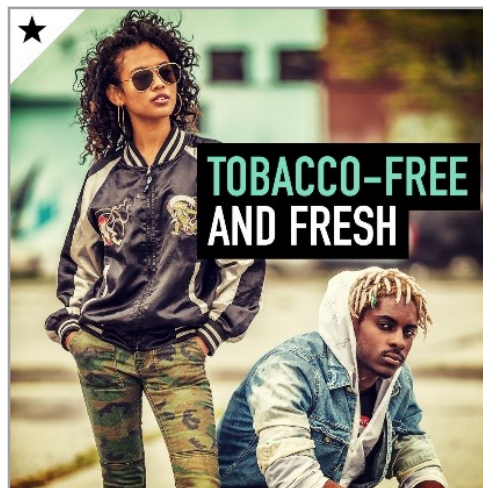
Examples of *Fresh Empire* social media content

These nano influencers allowed the campaign to demonstrate that it is possible to be a part of the hip-hop community without using cigarettes. Throughout the life cycle of the brand, nano influencers encouraged teens to have conversations about living tobacco-free and attend tobacco prevention campaign events.

Fresh Empire also worked with a smaller number of mega influencers (more than 1 million followers) to increase overall reach of the campaign. These influencers were carefully selected to ensure their followers were within our intended audience. Mega influencers generated hundreds of millions of impressions on content they created and posted, which increased the visibility of *Fresh Empire* and the tobacco prevention message. One influencer we worked with was Vince Staples, a popular rapper and singer. A 15-second video featuring Vince Staples generated almost 10 million impressions and almost 2 million video views.

What Can I Ask Influencers to Do?

For some, the first thing that comes to mind when the term "influencer" is mentioned is someone on social media holding a product and describing why they like it. However, in public health education campaigns, influencer programs can get creative in how the influencer helps accomplish goals. Some ideas for working with influencers include the following:

- Providing an influencer a defined message and asking them to deliver it as a photo or a video and post it on their page.

- Providing an influencer the general message and goal and giving them full creative freedom, allowing them to decide how to communicate that idea and post it on their page.

- Asking the influencer to create original images and videos that are shared on the sponsoring organization's pages (and not on the influencer's accounts). This is sometimes called "content creation," as explained above.

- Hiring an influencer to appear in your video content, similar to how other types of talent like actors are hired.

- Integrating provided messages or campaign content into the influencer's regularly scheduled work (e.g., public health messages are shared in a reoccurring podcast).

These are just a few examples. Explore an influencer's previous partnerships and completed work for ideas. Work with the influencer directly to determine the best approach.

CASE STUDY

Partnering With Micro Influencers to Decouple Dip and Sports

The Real Cost campaign partnered with influencers who live in rural areas to reach rural teen boys and deliver a prevention message about smokeless tobacco, or "dip." Based on research the campaign conducted, boys who live in rural areas often associate dip with manly activities in their communities, such as fishing, hunting, and sports. *The Real Cost* developed an influencer program grounded in this insight with the aim of decoupling the idea that dip is needed to fit in or for these activities to be fun and successful. By working with rural **micro influencers** (10k–50k followers), we aimed to increase credibility and trust in the message. The rural micro influencers were all popular in areas of interest for the audience.

- Spencer Lacy is a stand-up paddleboarder who created a video of himself tossing dip in a trash can and delivering the message, "Resilience doesn't come from a dip can. It comes from you."

- Brian Jackson is a football trick-shot kicker who filmed a video of himself kicking a football into a can of dip and knocking it into a trash can. He delivered the message, "Skill doesn't come from a dip can. It comes from you."

- John Burke is a baseball trick shot specialist who posted a video of himself hitting a can of dip with a baseball bat, destroying it, and delivering the message, "Dedication doesn't come from a dip can. It comes from you."

Screenshots from the influencer videos where the influencers demonstrate that skills come from one's self, not from a dip can

Integrating Influencers Into Your Communications Plan

Public health organizations have fundamentally different goals and objectives than commercial marketing. Therefore, selecting and utilizing influencers will vary depending on what the organization wants to achieve. As with any other media tactic, consider how and when you will want to use an influencer program to share your message. If a goal is to increase awareness of a message, popular influencers with millions of followers can have as wide a reach as other media platforms. When it comes to reaching a more specific or niche audience, numbers matter less and organizations may be interested in specific interest groups on social media, Reddit subthreads (e.g., subreddits), or certain TV channels (e.g., Cartoon Network). Influencers with modest followings and a strong connection to a certain audience or interest can be the best choice for a campaign trying to connect with audience members they are most trying to reach.

Bottom line: Treat influencer programs as another media tactic in a communications plan, and consider how the tactic supplements and reinforces other planned activities in your more comprehensive communications plan.
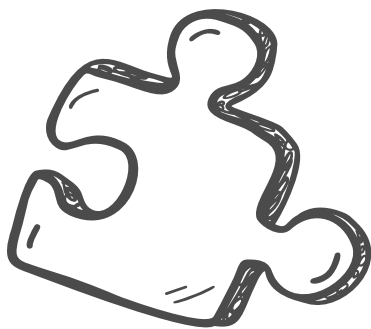
CASE STUDY

Partnering With Micro Influencers to Reach a Niche Audience

The Real Cost worked with micro influencers to reach a subset of the campaign audience with an e-cigarette prevention message. *The Real Cost* partnered with the platform Wattpad, which is an online social reading platform intended for users to read and write original stories. Wattpad's primary audience is female teenagers who have a passion for creative writing, a subset of *The Real Cost's* audience that is hard to reach through other media channels. *The Real Cost* partnered with three of Wattpad's star horror story writers to build out a 1-month takeover of the top horror thread: @Fright. Each writer was tasked with creating a horror story centered around a horror prompt. The stories were dystopian in nature, and ended with *The Real Cost* message, "If you vape, you may be inhaling metal particles." The stories were pinned to the top of the @Fright thread for maximum exposure in the horror community on Wattpad.

Title art for the three influencer-created stories

Infrastructure Needed for an Influencer Program

Partnering with influencers can be effective, but it requires resources. This includes both financial support (i.e., a budget) and staff time. As described in the following sections, influencer programs require gaining internal buy-in, identifying the right influencer(s), vetting possible influencer(s), reviewing proposed content, and much more. Here are some considerations for getting started:

- Consider your staff and their time. It may make sense to start with a single influencer instead of working with several to assess how much time is needed to manage a program with your needs.
- Consider your staff's comfort level with social media. Will they be able to jump in, or would they benefit from investing time in learning more about social media marketing?

- How mature is your organization's social media presence? This may inform how and when you want to engage with an influencer.

Overall, the scale of an influencer program will determine what infrastructure is needed before launch. Working with five mega influencers to reach millions of people would require vastly different infrastructure than working with one micro influencer who might reach 10,000 viewers. Consider staff time, existing social media presence, and goals of the intended program to determine what additional resources are required.

Getting Buy-In for an Influencer Program

Getting organizational support is critical to ensuring the success of any influencer program. Failing to do this in advance could lead to challenges if various stakeholders and decision makers in your organization are unfamiliar with the role of influencers in public health campaigns. It will be helpful to provide context and training to these decision makers. Describe the benefits and risks of an influencer program. When describing potential risks, show that you have considered how to minimize them, and have a mitigation plan in place. A sample justification for an influencer program is included below. This is only an example, and your organization should compile the justification that will be most relevant to your mission.

> *Research shows that hard-to-reach audiences are more receptive to messaging when it comes from someone who is perceived as credible and relatable. In order for the* Fresh Empire *campaign to drive behavior change among the intended audience, we will work with influencers to create content that will extend our message to their followers. Not only is this a tactic that other government agencies have used, but it is also how commercial brands reach intended audiences. We will employ rigorous selection criteria, vetting of influencers, legal contracts, close oversight, and other brand safety practices to minimize any risk involved with using influencers.*

Common questions that are expressed during the initial phases of planning for an influencer program, and how they can be addressed, include the following:

Q: Influencers are risky. What if they say something we don't agree with?

A: There is a certain degree of risk when working with influencers because they are human without the safeguards that many traditional brands have; however, there are ways to work with them that can reduce your risk. For example, instead of treating the influencer as a spokesperson, work with them as you would another media channel that is in your broader communications plan. You wouldn't purchase advertising space on Google and worry about the appearance of Google representing your organization. Thoroughly vet any potential influencers, create guidelines, and draft an agreement that manages your and the influencer's expectations, and create a mitigation plan, so if anything unexpected happens, you have a plan for how to respond. Alternatively, if you do not need the influencer to speak directly to an audience on their own channels, you can work with them as a content creator to generate material that will be posted directly on your

organization's social media channels. What's most important when considering working with influencers is understanding where your intended target is; if your audience is an influencer's audience, then that can be the most effective way for you to reach them.

Q: What if someone thinks the influencer is our spokesperson?

A: Influencers are not spokespeople, and all influencer content should disclose the paid relationship. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) requires that social media influencers disclose all financial, employment, personal, or family relationships with a brand, which includes paid partnerships. This helps to make it clear to the viewer that the influencer is being paid for their work and further distances the influencer from appearing like a spokesperson for your organization. For more information about FTC requirements, see Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers.

Q: I am concerned about the cost of influencers. Aren't they expensive?

A: They don't have to be! Working with nano influencers can cost as little as $100 and are comparable in price to other paid media tactics.

Q: I think influencers are only for teenagers. Are you sure we should use them to reach other audiences?

A: Influencer programs can be an effective tactic for any age group that has a significant presence online. There is an influencer for everyone! If you get to know influencers across popular social media platforms, you'll find influencers of all ages, representing nearly all hobbies, identities, and facets of society.

Other questions that may arise while securing buy-in include how to vet influencers, mitigate risk, and ensure brand safety. Those topics are discussed later in this guide.

SECTION SUMMARY: PREPARATION
Summary of How to Prepare for an Influencer Program

- Consider the goals and scale of the influencer program, and brainstorm how you want to work with an influencer.
- Determine what resources will be needed, including staffing, leadership buy-in, and justification.
- Plan how you will measure your influencer program.

Implementation

Finding the Right Influencers

Selecting an influencer should be guided by the organization's goal, intended audience, and budget. Once these variables are decided, it will be easier to determine what categories of influencers (micro, nano, etc.) will be best suited for a job. There are two basic ways to find the right influencer for a campaign: searching directly on social media or through an influencer management system. Searching keywords and hashtags that are relevant to a brand or topic are one way to find relevant influencers online. For example, let's assume that an organization is interested in sharing information about nutrition. Simply searching for hashtags such as #nutrition, #healthyeating, #healthyrecipes, etc., will curate relevant content. Look for influencers who are present in search results, and scroll through their feeds to see if their content generally aligns with your brand identity and messaging. Next, compile a list of possible influencers, and decide who you would like to meet with to explore overall fit and availability for the job. Once there are a few potential candidates, send them a direct message through the social media application, letting them know about your interest in working with them. A sample message that can be adapted and sent to an influencer is as follows:

> *Hello, Jane,*
> *My name is John and I work at the Department of Health. I'm reaching out to see if you might be interested in working with us on our campaign. To give you some more detail, the objective of this campaign is to reduce tobacco use among teens in the United States. We think you might be a great fit to work on this campaign, and we'd love to talk to you about it to see if you might be interested. Can you let me know your email address so I can tell you more?*

Sometimes influencers have contact information for themselves or their agents within their account bio. Always check prior to reaching out in a direct message so that you reach the influencer wherever they are most likely to receive the request.

A second way to find the right influencers is to work with an influencer management system. Management systems use a series of filters to help identify influencers. These systems also tend to offer a deeper look into each influencer's audience base, including followers' age, gender, and location. These systems usually charge a licensing fee, so be sure to include this in the program budget if you need this level of support.

It is also important to note that the digital landscape and, more specifically, which social media platforms and influencers are popular at a given time, can change quickly. As a part of understanding how best and where best to reach your audience, monitor these media trends and continue to look for relevant influencers for your program.

The following case study describes how a CTP campaign worked with LGBTQI+ influencers to prevent and reduce tobacco use for an intended audience.

CASE STUDY

Identifying Influencers for Special Audiences

The *This Free Life* campaign launched in 2016. At that time, there were more than 2 million lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) young adults (ages 18–24) living in the United States, and this population was nearly nearly twice as likely to use tobacco than other young adults. The goal of the campaign was to prevent and reduce tobacco use among LGBTQI+ young adults who occasionally smoke cigarettes. *This Free Life* was the first large-scale tobacco prevention campaign designed to reach LGBTQI+ young adults. LGBTQI+ represents many different groups of people in one acronym. To reach each segment of the audience authentically, we had to be strategic in our approach. Therefore, we sought out talent and imagery that reflected distinct subgroups of the LGBTQI+ population to increase reach and receptivity of the campaign messages. Through this process, we found that there was limited paid media geared toward cisgender lesbian and bisexual women, resulting in fewer impressions and lower campaign awareness among this group. As a result, we made a concerted effort to supplement other campaign paid media tactics by searching for and identifying influencers with a large proportion of cisgender female lesbian, gay, and bisexual followers. One example was an LGBTQI+ synchronized swimmer named Chloe. *This Free Life* highlighted her personal story related to her sexual identity and tobacco-free lifestyle in a series of videos where she gives her younger self advice and words of encouragement. Ultimately, this effort increased reach of *This Free Life* messages to people from this subgroup.

This Free Life talent pose with a Pride flag.

Vetting Your Influencers

Unlike other forms of paid media advertising, influencer programs have different dynamics because the content is intended to be created by, shared by, and associated with an individual. By design, organizations give up some elements of control when they use influencers. In other words, organizations will not be able to approve the content an influencer shares outside of the working agreement. Additionally, when influencers are given creative freedom, they may portray an idea or message in a way that is different from how an organization typically does. At worst, an influencer may post something that is out of line with an organization's mission. This unpredictability can be seen as "risky." It is possible to minimize concerns by vetting influencers, creating guidelines, and mitigating risks that may arise once the influencer is active and posting content.

Vetting an influencer includes thoroughly reviewing their social media page and any other published media about the person to ensure they do not have any content that is misaligned with your organization, your brand, or your mission. Write a list of "red flags" that, if present on an influencer page, would immediately remove them from consideration. Additionally, create a list of "yellow flags" that are questionable content areas, meaning that if present on an influencer page, your organization will review on a case-by-case basis and discuss whether it makes sense to proceed.

Examples of "red flags" include but are not limited to:

- Hateful Conduct: promoting violence, threatening, or harassing others based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, etc.
- Violence/Extremism: threatening violence against an individual and/or group of people; any form of glorifying of violence.
- Misinformation: spreading misinformation or disinformation.
- Illegal or Certain Regulated Goods or Services: selling, buying, or facilitating transactions in illegal goods or services (e.g., promoting the sale of alcohol to minors).
- Suicide or Self-Harm: promoting or encouraging suicide or self-harm.
- Abuse/Harassment: engaging in targeted harassment of individuals or inciting followers to harass someone. This includes sharing other people's private information without their expressed authorization or threatening to expose private information or incentivizing others to do so.
- Sensitive Media: sharing graphic violence, explicit language, and adult content. This includes promoting media that are excessively gory, violent, or considered adult content (i.e., explicit sexual content or explicit imagery/nudity).

Yellow flags tend to be specific to an organization, but may include topics such as controversial issues in pop culture and drug use.

For example, preventing youth tobacco use is a critical part of CTP's mission. Therefore, CTP asks all potential influencers to answer questions about their tobacco use in the past year and to sign a written statement attesting to their tobacco-free lifestyle.

During the vetting process, you will need to determine how much of an influencer's content it makes sense to review. This can include time (e.g., previous 6 months), channels (e.g., are they active in other spaces such as livestreams?), or activity (e.g., how do they engage with others on social media and who do they follow?). If you find any yellow flags, you may want to extend your vetting to get a better sense of their social media presence. A CTP vetting template is available for reference in the Appendix.

Vetting an influencer doesn't stop after they've been selected. Have a plan in place to assess the influencer continually (either daily or weekly) throughout the entire life cycle of an influencer program. Given that most influencers post content on their own social media channels regularly, this process can be a large undertaking. Additionally, what is considered a red or yellow flag

may change over time, so consider updating these lists as time goes on. For more on creating a plan, see the Mitigating Risk section on .

Ensuring an Influencer Follows Your Guidelines

Creating guidelines for your organization or your brand helps explain "dos" and "don'ts" to an influencer. Guidelines can ensure that influencer content is aligned with your organization and sets expectations with the influencer. Although guidelines are important to establish and communicate expectations, think about balancing feedback so it is not overly restricting the influencer's creative freedom. Some considerations for guidelines include:

- The history and mission of your organization or brand
- The goals of this influencer program (as defined in the "Preparation" section of this guide)
- Why the program wants to work with the influencer: Highlight what type of content you like so the influencer knows what parts of their work are most important for the program
- Highlight messages they should share, including whether they should share messages verbatim or if paraphrasing is okay
- Potential **"dos"** to mention:
  → Tagging your organization or brand in text, mentioning your organization or brand by name, disclosing the sponsorship in voice-over, making the post feel organic to the influencer's feed and style, and being considerate of the environment, location, and surrounding people
- Potential **"don'ts"** to mention:
  → Using other brand names or logos; using songs, content, or artwork without having the rights; having drugs or alcohol visible; showing other people without their permission; using explicit language or showing explicit content; shaming others; "preaching" a message; and using language that normalizes behaviors or could have unintended consequences (e.g., "although smoking may be popular...")

Share the guidelines with the influencer and ask if they have any questions or feedback. This is an important step in setting expectations and should not be rushed or ignored.

Managing Expectations

After you feel confident that your vetted influencer is aligned with your guidelines, most programs will ask an influencer to sign a contract, memorandum of understanding, or another form of written agreement that clearly outlines expectations between the two parties. This guide refers to this document as your "agreement."

The agreement should outline both the type and number of deliverables the influencer should produce with detailed specifications for each deliverable. For example, instead of saying "post a Snapchat story," say, "post a Snapchat story filmed vertically with a minimum of 10 seconds and

maximum of 120 seconds of content posted on your feed with both text overlay and voice-over including a swipe-up link to XYZ location."

The agreement should convey the timeline that the influencer should follow. Include how many rounds of influencer content review are needed, how long your organization's reviews will take, and the time frame in which the final deliverable should be posted. Other details could dictate an ideal day of the week and time you want the final content posted, information about your overall editorial calendar, and if the influencer should keep the content on their page for a certain amount of time (i.e., a week, a month, or longer). If the influencer's content is tied to an organizational event (i.e., a program launch) the agreement can ask the influencer to post at a specific time on your launch day.

The agreement should convey the level of autonomy that the influencer will have. In general, influencers like to have creative freedom. More freedom allows them to deliver a message in a way that is true to their style. This can also help campaign messages reach their followers in an authentic way. However, sometimes it's important for a message to be conveyed in a more controlled way. If so, explicitly say this in the agreement. For example, assume that a campaign is trying to encourage people to include physical activity in their everyday lives. The agreement can request that the influencer does something physically active while they share a message. Other asks could include a specific tone (i.e., humorous or serious) or a key takeaway that you want their viewers to have after viewing the content. These requests should overlap with guidelines.

Another component of an agreement is a list of the messages the influencer should include in their content. Remember to specify if they should deliver the message verbatim or if they can share it in their own words. Here is an example of messaging guidelines that CTP's *The Real Cost* campaign provided to influencers:

> *The goal of the influencer program is to share with your viewers that smoking can lead to a loss of control due to addiction. The specific messages are, "if I smoke, I could become controlled by smoking," "If I smoke, I could be giving up a part of my freedom," and "If I smoke, I could be unable to stop when I want." We want you to share one of these messages in your own words. The tone should be positive and aspirational.*

Finally, any agreement should detail expected compensation, how they will receive their payment, and when they will receive payment. If the influencer has an agent, they will provide a cost estimate during initial discussions. Similarly, influencer management systems will have cost information available. The cost should be agreed upon as soon as possible to avoid wasting time.

Creating Content

Remember that each influencer has built a following based on people who resonate with their messaging and style of content. Recognizing this, the influencer should be given as much creative liberty as possible for the post to be authentic and credible, but if you have specific requests, let the influencer know up front. For ideas about how to creatively work with

influencers, see the How Can I Work With Influencers section. Some things to discuss before any content is created include:

- What is the tone of the post? Happy? Scary?
- How long will the video be?
- Do you want the influencer to mention your organization or brand and message in the beginning, middle, or end?
- What will the viewers' takeaway message be?
- Are there any icons or props that the influencer should include?
- Is there anything that the influencer should avoid, such as brands or swear words?
- In general, how much creative liberty does the influencer have? Are you expecting to see a script or a storyboard beforehand? How many times will you get to review and provide feedback before the content is made?

Some of the items above should be covered in the guidelines and the agreement. However, it is helpful to clarify essential points again before any content is created.

CASE STUDY

Partnering With Mid-Sized Influencers to Create Content

The Real Cost campaign launched an influencer program to reach the athletic-minded teens in our audience and to underscore the idea that vaping can not only harm yourself but also your teammates. *The Real Cost* partnered with two **mid-sized influencers** who are known for creating basketball content. The idea for the tagline "There Is No Vape in Team" speaks to athletic teens' desire to perform well in their sport and not let their teammates down.

- Paisley Johnson is a BYU basketball player and YouTube blogger. In her video, she takes teens step by step through how she prepares for a basketball road trip and how vaping doesn't have a part in her preparation. The end message Paisley delivers is, "If you are vaping, you might be your team's weak link. There is no vape in team." Paisley published this video on her YouTube channel.

- Tristan Jass is an acrobatic basketball trick-shot specialist and former D-1 player who is well known on YouTube. In his video, he delivers the campaign message as he dribbles around defenders easily, then shoots a three-pointer and swishes. The message he delivers throughout the video is, "If you are vaping off the court, you could be the weak link on the court. There is no vape in team." Tristan published this video on his YouTube channel.
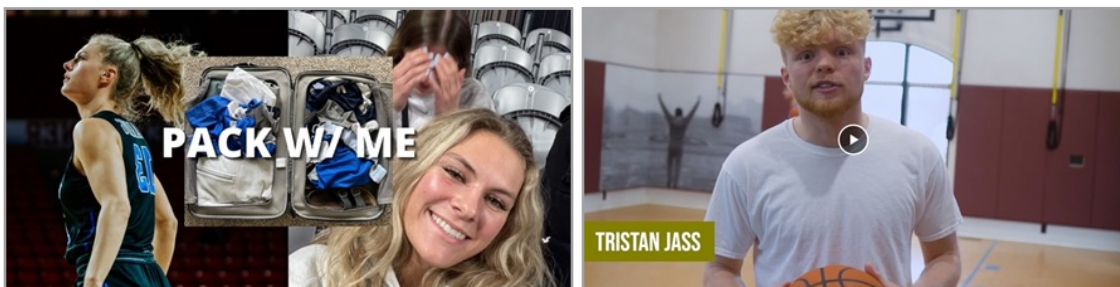
Video thumbnails for Paisley and Tristan's YouTube videos

Amplifying Content

Once the content is posted, there are strategies you can use to maximize its impact. For instance, content can reach even more people beyond just the influencer's followers using paid media. This will result in more people who see the content but requires an understanding of how to buy paid media advertising. We don't describe how to purchase paid media advertising in this guide, but there are numerous resources online and from social media companies about how to purchase advertising space on their platforms. Some resources that explain how to purchase advertising space online include:

- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/business/marketing/facebook
- Instagram: https://business.instagram.com
- Twitter: https://business.twitter.com
- Tik Tok: https://getstarted.tiktok.com

Another way you can amplify influencer posts is to share them on your organization's own social media pages, so your followers see your partnership with the influencer. Consider the potential impact of sharing content and whether or not sharing aligns with your program's goals. For example, if your influencer is popular with teens and your organization's social media pages have teen followers, it would be appropriate to share content on your social media pages. However, if your organization does not have followers from the intended audience and your goal is to achieve authenticity and credibility with the audience through the influencer's voice, then you may want to amplify their posts with paid media instead of sharing posts on your social media pages.

Additionally, consider requesting partner organizations to repost your content on their social media pages. If their followers are within your intended audience, this is another great way to reach an overlapping audience, engage partners, and extend the reach of your content.

CASE STUDY

Showcasing Influencer Talent in Their Own Words

To find novel ways to present well-known cigarette-related health facts in a relevant and attention-grabbing way, the *Fresh Empire* campaign partnered with hip-hop musicians to create content. The campaign aimed to build credibility and authenticity as a relevant source of tobacco-related health information among hip-hop teens. Hip-hop teens value self-expression through music, like to find the hottest up-and-coming artists, and spend hours of their day on social media. With this information in mind, *Fresh Empire* created "The New Wave," an online rap contest that featured influencers who developed custom lyrics with tobacco prevention messaging. Through "The New Wave," we balanced talent creativity and brand needs by sourcing nano, micro, and mid-tier-influencers through social media and then producing, editing, and posting a structured bracket-style competition. Videos featured each influencer performing their original lyrics, for which we provided guidelines (e.g., must contain a tobacco-free message, no profanity, etc.). We posted the influencers' performances on *Fresh Empire*'s social media pages and amplified the content with paid media, driving teens to the website to vote for their favorite performance each week. Influencers were motivated to share their content on their own social media pages and drive followers to the *Fresh Empire* website in order to receive votes for their work.

Examples of *Fresh Empire* social media content appealing to the audience's interest in hip-hop music

Managing Editorial Calendars

Content is managed using editorial calendars, which ensures all parties are aligned before anything is posted. Editorial calendars are especially useful when an influencer is creating more than one piece of content. They start with a blank template (see Figure 2) that the influencer will fill in as they brainstorm what they'd like to create. An organization can also use the document to provide feedback and gain internal approval on the planned content.

As mentioned, all parties should agree on the number of rounds of feedback allowed prior to creating content. This can also be reflected in editorial calendars. Other details may cover the posting date, posting time, platform, content, caption, and any other relevant information. If the influencer is creating a video, they may share a script or a storyboard with you as part of the editorial calendar. This not only helps with monitoring posts, but also holds the influencer accountable for posting specific content on agreed-upon dates and times.

Figure 2: Editorial Calendar Shell

Date/Time	Platform	Caption	Image/Script/Storyboard

Mitigating Risk

Just like any other media tactic, influencer programs can include some risks. However, there are ways to mitigate risk and ensure your program runs smoothly. These ways include vetting the influencer, creating brand guidelines, and establishing an agreement. Even with these proactive steps, organizations should be prepared to address any challenges with a mitigation plan. A mitigation plan maps out actions the organization will take to address identified red and yellow flags. As a precursor to these mitigation strategies, be prepared to have an open and honest conversation with the influencer about any and all concerns. Some potential risk mitigation steps could include the following:

- Discuss your brand guidelines with the influencer at the beginning of the work to ensure they are understood.
- Remove the influencer's post from your page (if reposted).
- Pause any paid media support for the influencer's posts.
- Determine if your organization will need to acknowledge the influencer's actions. This could include developing talking points and/or a press release to distance your organization from the influencer.
- Ask the influencer to delay posting to create space between your content and the problematic content.
- Ask the influencer to confirm their future content will be brand-safe.
- Consider whether you want to continue the relationship with the influencer in the future.
- Ask the influencer to delete the content they created for your organization from their page.

Each organization will have a different risk appetite and should determine appropriate mitigation strategies that match the organization's tolerance level. These strategies should be considered when creating the influencer agreement.

SECTION SUMMARY: IMPLEMENTATION

- Create a list of your organization's red and yellow flags.
- Vet potential influencers and review content on all of their social media pages.
- Create brand guidelines for your influencer program and ensure the influencer feels comfortable following them.
- Establish an agreement with the influencer.
- Use an editorial calendar to review and provide feedback on content.
- Consider whether you will amplify the content.
- Plan for how you will mitigate any issues that arise.

Measurement

Identifying and Collecting Metrics of Interest

Remember when you set the goals for your influencer program? While setting the goals, take the time to also consider how you will assess the success of your program. Two common ways to measure the impact of an influencer program are to compare metrics before and after the influencer program (pre- and post-comparisons) and by comparing the metrics of the program against predetermined criteria.

Pre- and post-comparisons help us understand if partnering with influencers is effective. However, in order to use this approach, metrics need to be recorded and monitored before launching an influencer program. These metrics will tell us where we started before taking any action. For example, if the goal is to gain more followers, we need to know how many followers an account has to begin with. This will provide context for how many followers are gained (or lost) during and after a program. If an account accumulated followers at the end of a program, that can be treated as a sign of success.

Another option is to compare influencer campaign metrics with metrics from a different period of the campaign. Determining this period can be subjective, so you will need to assess what makes sense for your program. For example, if an organization's past 10 posts on a vaping prevention toolkit generated an average of 100 likes/reactions, 20 comments, and five shares, those metrics can be used as a comparison for influencer posts promoting the vaping toolkit.

Data are available from a number of sources across social media platforms. Some data sources include:

- The influencer's social media metrics for their posts related to your program
- The comments on the influencer's post(s)
- Your campaign's social media metrics
- If a link was provided, click-through rate (CTR) and unique visits for the landing destination

Interpreting Metrics to Measure the Success of Influencer Content

There are various ways to measure success, but it is important to caution that extracting meaning from influencer program data is notoriously difficult, and it's important not to over-state what an influencer program achieved.

For example, social media engagement shows how many people interacted with the content. Engagement can be compared across posts, campaigns, and influencers. It is also possible to track the follower growth of a brand over time to see any uptick surrounding the dates the influencer(s) posted. Any increase in followership could be attributed to people being exposed to a brand through an influencer (or influencers).

Looking beyond the numbers, tools like sentiment analysis help make sense of open-ended, unstructured written text. Sentiment analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that looks at the responses of followers to content. Whether or not someone should do sentiment analysis is determined by — you guessed it — established goals. Sentiment analysis can be particularly useful for tracking changes in public opinion. It can also help shed light on emotions surrounding topics (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral attitudes). However, sentiment analysis also currently struggles to detect or categorize sarcasm, memes/images/videos, and emojis.

Table 2 links common goals to example metrics. There is no right and wrong measurement approach, so decide what makes the most sense for your organization.

Table 2: Common Goals and Related Metrics

Goal	Metrics
Increase awareness of program, brand, or campaign	Number of followers, reposts, mentions, and hashtags
Promote program or message (e.g., a new resource for e-cigarette cessation)	Click-through rate to resources and number of unique website visitors to a resource
Improve audience receptivity	Sentiment analysis (tracking emotions linked to a program, brand, or message)
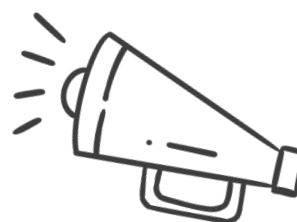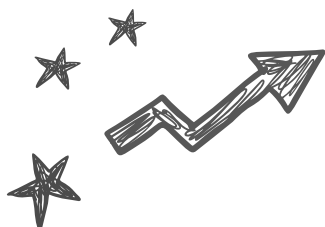
Here's an example of how someone might interpret and share the results of an influencer program without overstating what their program achieved:

1. **Describe what happened:** Between July and August 2021, influencer [name] posted three Instagram stories where she authentically shared our program message in her own words and style. Our organization reposted this content on our Instagram pages.

2. **Share metrics:** To assess progress toward a goal of increasing awareness, we compared the engagement rate on the influencer's posts to our average engagement rate between January and July 2021. The organizational average engagement rate is 8%, and the influencer posts garnered an average engagement rate of 36%.

3. **Interpret results:** The influencer's posts generated more than four times higher engagement than our organization's posts between January and July 2021. This higher engagement could be an indication of greater attention paid to the campaign message and positive message receptivity.

CASE STUDY

Measuring Influencer Impact

Based on formative research and cultural insights, *This Free Life* found that LGBTQI+ young adults see drag queens as "superheroes of the community" who are influential inside and outside of social/nightlife environments. Therefore, the campaign featured videos of well-known, tobacco-free drag queens in an online quiz series and worked with the drag queen influencers to create and post social media content with the goal of promoting the quiz series. Some of the promotional social media content was produced by the campaign,and some was created by the influencers. The influencers posted directly on their social media pages, and the campaign cross-promoted on its pages. To assess performance, we tracked metrics across the platforms used to promote the quiz to obtain an overall picture of engagement with the video series. The engagement metrics we tracked included clicks, video completions, likes/reactions, comments, shares, and quiz completions. We found that the drag queen video series generated more than 2.5 million engagements, which was more engagements than previous efforts by campaign influencers. Compared to these previous efforts, overall engagements saw a 242% increase, and social media post shares increased by 75%.

Additionally, we performed a sentiment analysis on the comments shared in response to the promotional social media content to assess audience reactions by coding for positive/negative tone and common themes. The results of this analysis showed a high percentage of comments expressing admiration for the influencers (e.g., "I love her!"), a moderate percentage of comments expressing inspiration to stop smoking (e.g., "I feel like I can really quit smoking now that she encouraged me!"), and a low percentage of negative comments (e.g., "They wear too much makeup").

Prepare to Do It Again, but Better

Thinking about what comes next, assess both the results the influencer program and the process for implementation. What worked well, and what needs to be changed for the next time?

Did the program achieve set goals?
Review available metrics and measures. Did the program meet your goals? Did it exceed them? It's okay to look beyond initially identified metrics as you learn what works and what is important for your influencer program.

How was the process?
Reflect on the process of managing the program and the bigger picture. If the program incurred costs from payment of influencers or paid media spend, did those costs justify the impact? Consider the internal process. Did the program garner internal buy-in or resistance to trying the tactic? Was it challenging to identify the "right" influencer? Was the influencer a good fit for the program and goals? Did staff have the bandwidth to manage the program?

Revisit the planning and implementation process, and assess how each step went. Decide if each step of the process was successful or if it could be improved. Think about recommendations for future programs, and capture this feedback in a "lessons learned" document. While these reflections may feel fresh in the moment, it is easy to forget details, especially if they are not immediately used in the next campaign. Lessons learned also will be valuable for new staff or later on if content is needed for a program impact report. Having documented lessons learned will help make the process smoother for the organization, the influencer, and the core team because you will be able to refer to these past lessons to build on your success.

SECTION SUMMARY: MEASUREMENT

Summary of Measuring an Influencer Program

- Based on a set goal or goals, determine possible ways of measuring impact before executing the influencer program.
- Identify how and where to collect metrics.
- Reflect on each step of the planning and implementation process, and assess whether the process was sufficient or needs to be improved.
- Document lessons learned while they are top of mind.

Conclusion

This guide has outlined practical tips for designing, implementing, and measuring influencer programs using examples from CTP's prevention campaigns. Although we aimed to be comprehensive in our topics, there is no better substitute for learning than doing. Once you've implemented your own influencer program, you will find additional lessons learned that can be incorporated into future programs.

Request a CTP Speaker

Want to hear more about influencers from a CTP expert? Find out how to Request a CTP Speaker for your next event.

Appendix

Sample Influencer Vetting Form

DATE:	
PREPARED BY:	

[Insert a picture of the influencer and an executive summary detailing why this influencer is being considered]

NAME	
AGE	
GENDER IDENTITY	
PROFESSION	
INFLUENCER BIOGRAPHY Accomplishments, insights into personal and professional background	
WHAT IS THE INFLUENCER BEST KNOWN FOR?	
WHAT IS THE SOCIAL MEDIA/ONLINE PRESENCE OF THE INFLUENCER? Channels, number of followers. Include links to social media platforms or other published media about this person. Who does the influencer follow on social channels?	
IDENTIFY KNOWN AND/OR PROJECTED INFLUENCER RISKS Potential red and yellow flags identified during content review	

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