



# Strategies for Communicating Title IV, Part A Program Information to LEAs

## INFORMATION SHEET

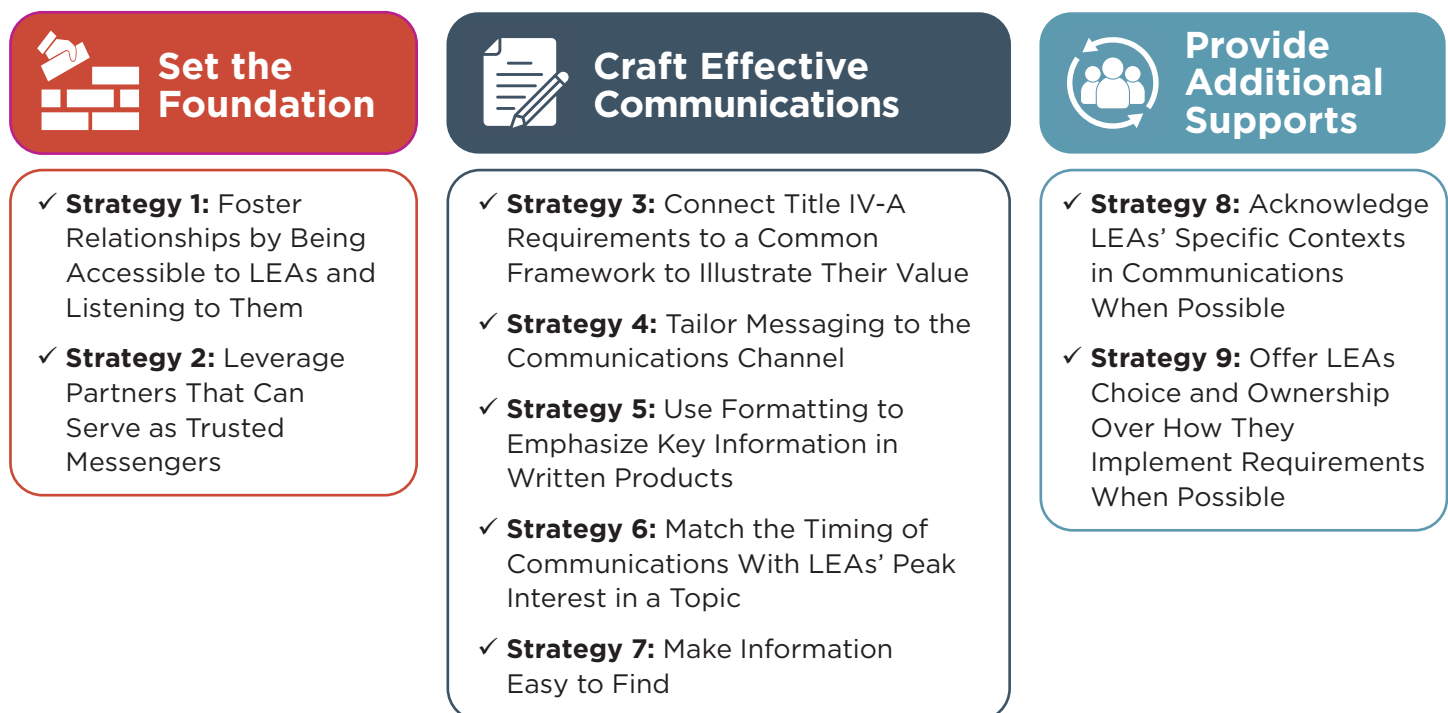
The strategies in this resource will help State coordinators craft communications that put Federal and state Title IV, Part A requirements on the to-do lists of local education agency (LEA) staff members, who are often balancing multiple priorities with limited time. State education agencies' strategies for working with LEAs are divided into three categories: setting the foundation, crafting effective communications, and providing additional supports.

### Introduction

A primary responsibility of Title IV, Part A (Title IV-A) State coordinators (SCs) is to communicate program requirements to local education agencies (LEAs). The [Title IV-A statute](#) authorizes SCs to conduct this work. Specifically, State education agencies (SEAs) may use funds reserved for administrative activities to engage in communications that build capacity and disseminate best and/or promising practices (Section 4104(b)).<sup>1</sup>

The goal of communicating Title IV-A requirements is twofold – to ensure that LEAs (1) are aware of the requirements and (2) implement them with fidelity. This resource offers advice on how SCs can communicate both state and Federal Title IV-A requirements in a way that leads to improved LEA outcomes and provides strategies to support this work. Figure 1 provides an overview of the strategies.

**Figure 1: An Overview of Strategies for Communicating With LEAs**





## Strategies to Set the Foundation for Positive Communications

Establishing good relationships and building trust are foundational for good communication. People generally are more likely to follow requests or guidance when they know and trust the individual or agency making the requests or providing guidance.

### Strategy 1: Foster Relationships by Being Accessible to LEAs and Listening to Them

SCs have a variety of opportunities to connect with their LEAs. Many SEAs host annual meetings, conferences, and/or professional development events for their whole state. SCs can use these gatherings to meet LEAs, either through informal networking or through dedicated sessions focused on listening to LEAs. Outside of these statewide events, SCs can build relationships by fostering open lines of communication with LEAs. Posting SC contact information, being responsive to questions, and hosting regular office hours help LEAs see that SCs are there to support them.

### Strategy 2: Leverage Partners That Can Serve as Trusted Messengers

Even as SCs work on building relationships, LEAs may view their SC as only one source of information. SCs may also communicate through dissemination partners that LEAs trust. When communicating information to LEAs, SCs should consider whether including some outside voices may make the message more effective. These groups can include

- Professional organizations (e.g., school nurses association and teachers association)
- Tribal groups
- Community organizations, including after-school and/or athletics groups
- Health and human service agencies with overlapping priorities
- Institutions of higher education
- Other LEAs

Using a dissemination partner can not only help SCs reach LEAs with whom they do not have a strong connection, but can also help reinforce messaging across all LEAs.



#### State Example: New Hampshire

In New Hampshire, the SC holds [regular office hours](#) to provide LEAs with guidance and support in understanding Title IV-A. These office hours consist of a brief training segment, followed by an open discussion where LEAs can ask questions and receive guidance.





## Strategies to Craft Effective Communications

Effective communications capture attention, expand people’s understanding of a topic, and encourage action. How a message is delivered matters as much as the content.

### Strategy 3: Connect Title IV-A Requirements to a Common Framework to Illustrate Their Value

Studies have shown that using a shared framework helps people understand the purpose of their work as they move toward a common future, which can motivate them to complete tasks. A shared framework also creates consistent language, which can make requirements easier to understand. As part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), all SEAs submit a plan sharing how they will hold schools and districts accountable for meeting state education goals. The ESSA state plan is one framework that SCs can use to share Title IV-A requirements.



#### State Example: Utah

[Utah’s Title IV-A work](#) has included

the development of a Standards Implementation Institute and content integration resources to support educators’ professional development. The Title IV-A staff have connected these efforts to the state’s strategic plan and vision for Utah students.



#### State Example: Arizona

Videos, podcasts, and similar channels can provide a lot of information in a way that is easy for LEAs to consume. Arizona launched the [Reimagine Education With Title IV-A Podcast](#). The 15- to 30-minute episodes shared creative educational programming across the state.

### Strategy 4: Tailor Messaging to the Communications Channel

Email, social media, presentations, and guidance documents are just some of the communication channels available to share information. The scope of information that can be shared varies across channels. A tweet can share only a small amount of information; a guidance document can cover a lot more. When communicating requirements to LEAs, SCs should consider how much space is available and limit their main points accordingly. Another good strategy is to distribute information across several different channels to suit different purposes. For example, an SC may send an email to introduce or give the basics on a requirement, then offer expanded information in a tool kit or guidance document.

### Strategy 5: Use Formatting to Emphasize Key Information in Written Products

Websites, emails, and other forms of online communication have changed how people read. Rather than reading word for word, people are more likely to scan information and pick out key words and phrases. Multiple strategies exist to draw readers’ eyes and appropriately emphasize key ideas, including headings and subheadings, lists, highlighting words (either via hyperlinking or bolding text), callout boxes, tables, and graphs.

When drafting written materials, SCs should consider formats that make the most sense for the information they are covering. The number of formatting types used will vary on the basis of the size of the resource. For example, using all the types listed above might be overwhelming in a one-page document, but be fine in a five- or 10-page document. When it comes to headers and callout boxes, SCs should focus on clarity over cleverness to maximize understanding.

## Strategy 6: Match the Timing of Communications With LEAs' Peak Interest in a Topic

Sometimes, timing really is everything. LEAs can more easily follow a requirement if they receive information when that requirement is top of mind. School years generally have a predictable cycle, and recurring deadlines can help SCs pace information and reminders. Such reminders can support staff at smaller LEAs that may be overseeing multiple programs. In addition, LEA staff members often change. Take advantage of opportunities presented during the onboarding of new LEA staff by developing and offering a primer on the Title IV-A program and state-specific implementation details. Finally, events can bring specific topics of interest to the forefront (e.g., promoting equity for different groups of students or raising awareness of school health activities).

## Strategy 7: Make Information Easy to Find

It is not always possible to predict when LEAs will need certain information. Having resources that are easy to find and navigate will empower LEAs to search for information when they have questions. One way SCs can support LEAs is through search engine optimization — that is, the practice of matching the wording on Web materials to the keywords LEAs use to search for information. Another option is to ensure that the searcher can easily navigate to the SEA Website and that Title IV-A information is appropriately spotlighted.



### Get Communications Help

SCs can work with their SEA's communications staff on practices such as using search engine optimization and spotlighting Title IV-A information on the SEA Website. In particular, communications staff can offer SCs guidance based on metrics. Learn more via the T4PA Center Resource *Developing a Title IV, Part A Communications Plan*.



## Strategies to Provide Additional Support to Encourage Use of Title IV-A Requirements

Being aware of a requirement is not the only factor that influences adherence. In some cases, communication alone is not sufficient, and other supports may be needed. The following strategies may not be possible or appropriate in every circumstance. In the cases where these strategies can be applied, however, they may make the difference between LEAs implementing the information rather than simply receiving it.

## Strategy 8: Acknowledge LEAs' Specific Contexts in Communications When Possible

SCs will most likely be able to implement this strategy when communicating one-on-one or with a small group of LEAs. To inform their conversations, SCs can rely on information they have gleaned via the LEA applications for funds and their relationship-building activities. This strategy applies to both logistical and social contexts. For example, SCs can practice cultural awareness and competence to consider how the backgrounds and experiences of different communities may affect how they perceive communications and the requirements.

## Strategy 9: Offer LEAs Choice and Ownership Over How They Implement Requirements When Possible

Sometimes LEAs have to fulfill requirements in a specific way; however, in the places where there is flexibility, providing choice and agency may make them more likely to follow the Title IV-A requirements. SC communications can facilitate that agency by explicitly stating when there is flexibility and sharing options. This can be accomplished through Websites, newsletters, and other channels that allow people to browse at their leisure. SCs can also highlight how different options may be better suited for specific contexts and share the stories of LEAs' innovations across the state. To promote innovations and peer sharing, SCs may wish to ask who is interested in connecting with their peers and facilitate those opportunities.

## Conclusion

SCs can help LEAs adhere to Title IV-A requirements through strong communications that increase awareness about the requirements and their benefits. However, effective communication is more than simply good writing or nice formatting. Thinking about framing, timing, and breaking up information strategically can all support LEAs' understanding of the requirements. Additionally, moving LEAs from awareness to action requires building strong relationships before a communication is sent out and following through with the needed supports once information is shared. Efforts to interact regularly with LEAs, understand their specific contexts, and highlight how to adapt Title IV-A requirements to meet those contexts can strengthen communications efforts and encourage LEAs to implement requirements with fidelity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For specific references in the statute, see sections 4104(b)(1), 4104(b)(3)(B)(iii), 4104(b)(3)(B)(iv), 4104(b)(3)(C)(iv), 4104(b)(3)(C)(vi).



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