

# COMMUNICATING TO PARENTS ABOUT QRIS

## Part **1** of 4



# Creating a Communications Framework

### *What you'll learn...*

Part 1 of this four-part series describes where to start in your efforts to communicate with parents of young children in your state. Learn how to build a communications framework that identifies who your different audiences are and what they care about; where they get their information; how to identify the message you want to communicate; and, how to estimate the costs for executing your communications plan.

**You've developed a robust quality rating and improvement system (QRIS); you've enrolled a large portion of providers; and now you're ready to develop a parent outreach campaign.**

## **Where do you start?**

You can begin to build a framework by understanding who your different audiences are and what they care about, and gain an understanding of where they get their information. In addition, it's important for you to determine the messaging objective for your campaign, and start to think about the possible budget you may need.

### **Use these four steps to build your communications framework:**

**1 Identify the audiences you'll use to reach parents.**

Hint: it's more than just parents.

**2 Use an audience-centered approach to communicate what's relevant to each of those groups.**

What does each audience care about, and how does that align with what they need to know about quality rating and improvement systems? Where do they get their information?

**3 Choose the one—and only one!—message you want to communicate to parents in this campaign.**

This messaging objective should be relevant to parents and should address an issue of concern to *them*.

**4 Consider your budget range when deciding which marketing strategy to use to make the most effective use of your dollars.**

Should you focus on only certain target communities, or can you afford to cast a wider net by marketing to the masses?

*Let's look at each step more thoroughly...*



Keep in mind that parents will likely consult a number of sources as they explore options for early childhood education, so a broad communication plan that reaches a wide range of audiences is critical to the success of your quality rating and improvement system by reinforcing the message through multiple channels.

Since the list of Family Influencers in your state is broad, it can be helpful to think about three categories of influence: Healthcare Influencers, Statewide-Service Influencers, and Community-Based Influencers.

**Healthcare Influencers:**

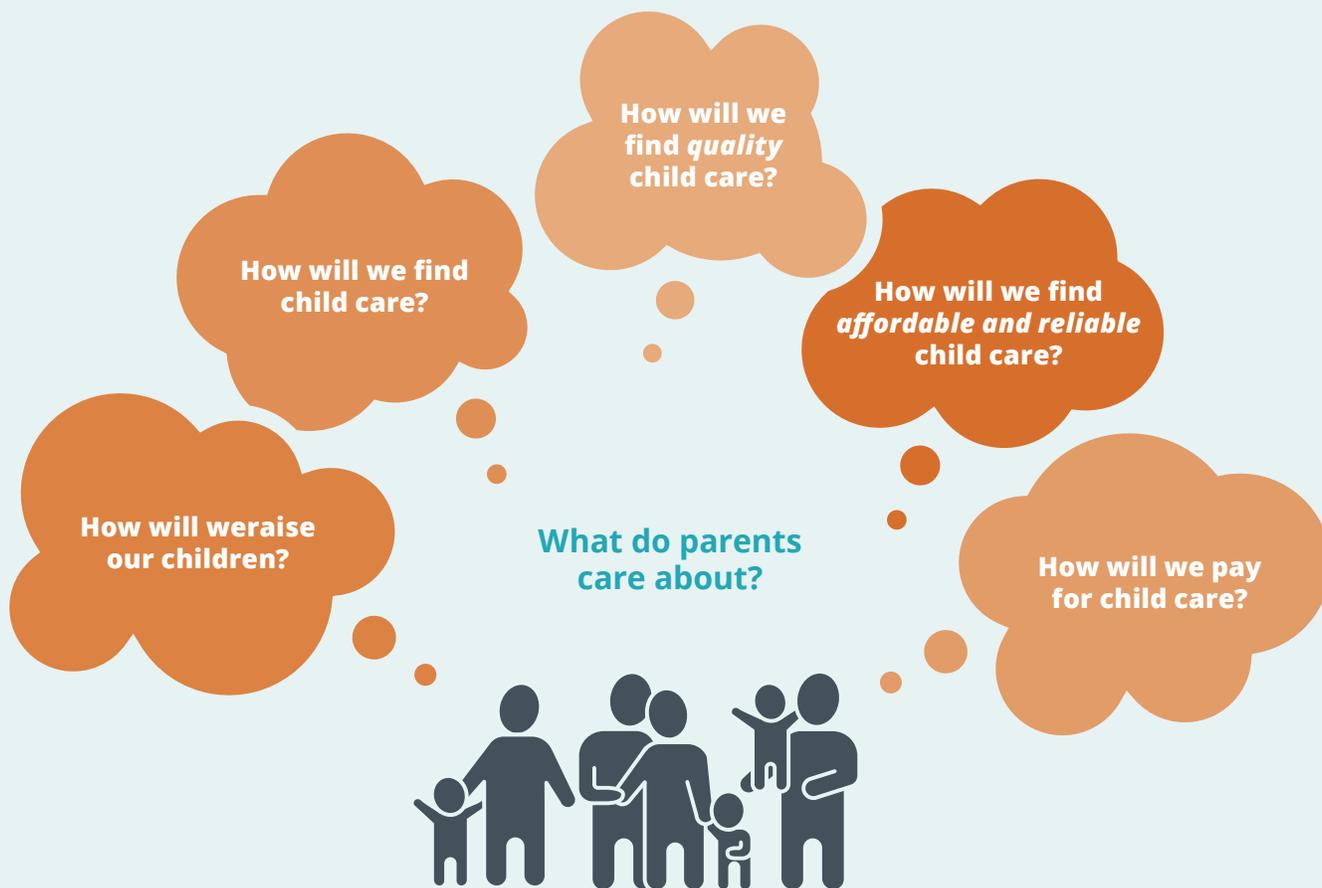
- Doctors and Pediatricians
- Hospitals
- Community Healthcare Facilities

**Statewide-Service Influencers:**

- State and Governmental Bodies
- Home-Visiting Organizations
- Parenting Resources/Parenting Education Services
- Early-Intervention Organizations

**Community-Based Influencers:**

- Public Libraries
- Zoos
- Children’s Museums
- Parenting Websites and Education Programs
- And many more



## STEP #2:

### Communicate What's Relevant to Each Audience

To be sure you reach each of these groups with information that's right for them, consider their different needs and focus on what they care about. Given your expertise in the area of quality rating and improvement systems and all the work your state has done to develop your QRIS, it can be tempting to share everything with everyone. After all, doesn't every parent want to know the specific research used to define "quality care" for their children?

In this case, less may be more. Burdening someone with too much information could make it impossible for them to understand *any* of it.

**Providers** are a special sort of audience when it comes to reaching parents—and giving them the right message and tools is important. Refer to the blog entitled [\*Offering Benefits to Providers Who Participate in Your QRIS—While Educating Parents and Families\*](#) for more information on addressing this group.

With **parents**, it's valuable to focus on QRIS as a solution to important child care-related issues. We know that while parents of young children have limited time, there are specific issues related to childcare that matter to them (see previous page).

Your overall message should reinforce that a quality rating and improvement system addresses all of these concerns. To have the most impact with your direct-to-parents communications, the message can describe how quality rating and improvement systems answer the question of how to find quality, affordable, reliable child care that aligns with their parenting needs.

In regard to **family influencers**, the needs of these different audiences vary depending on the influencer's role and their level of interaction with the families. Some influencers (like a doctor's office or state agency) are actively involved in direct service to the families and will need more information, while others (like a library) play a more passive role in influencing parents and families so will need less specific information.

For those groups that have more personal interactions with parents and families of young children, the communications should:

- 1 Explain** what a quality rating and improvement system is
- 2 Introduce** the name/brand of your state's QRIS
- 3 Clarify** how this system can help parents find quality-rated child care
- 4 Outline** the many resources your QRIS makes available to help parents; these resources may include:
  - a)** website for information and online search for child care providers
  - b)** toll-free number to call for help
  - c)** checklist for parents to use when exploring different programs

Effective communications that educate and empower the Provider, Parent, and Family Influencer groups to share the message of your state's quality rating and improvement system will serve to reinforce the other communications work you're doing, and lead to the potential for more success with your QRIS.



### **STEP #3:**

## **Choose the One Message You Want to Communicate**

In setting a messaging objective for the campaign, you need to decide on the one *single* idea you want to communicate. As noted in Step 2, this idea must be based on what parents care about. For example, in our work with Rhode Island's BrightStars, their campaign message focused on helping parents find quality rated care and education for their children.

Once you've chosen the objective for your campaign message, the creative team will use this focus in developing the creative for this outreach campaign.

You may also find it helpful to create micro-goals related to specific campaign tactics. We will review more detailed strategy and tactics in [Part 2 of the series \*Communicating to Parents About QRIS\*](#).



#### **STEP #4:**

### **Think About Your Budget at a High Level**

If there are people on your team who have worked on large-scale marketing campaigns, they may have an idea of the budget needed to achieve your goals. If not, it may be helpful to have some framing. (See [Part 2 of this series \*Communicating to Parents About QRIS\*](#) for more detail about costs.)

**There are two marketing strategies you can use to reach parents: targeted marketing and mass marketing.**

- **Targeted marketing** is just that—it's intended to reach a particular subset of people through a specific marketing vehicle. In the case of QRIS, using a community

outreach strategy where you focus on organizations and services that serve children 0-5 is a great way to connect with the parents and families you want to reach. The key to this strategy is to create marketing materials that both address the needs of a specific audience, and at the same time have many uses beyond that audience. (Refer to [Part 3 of this series \*Communicating to Parents About QRIS\*](#) for examples of how we developed this idea for BrightStars' parents outreach campaign.)

- **Mass marketing** operates differently by casting a much wider net through things like TV commercials, radio ads, billboards, transit shelters, and bus panels. Mass marketing is both high-cost and low-reuse—meaning that each element in mass-market advertising is designed for just that use. While that strategy reaches many people and can bring high visibility to your brand (all of which is very positive), many of the people you reach will have no need of, or interest in, a quality rating and improvement system.

Be aware that mass-market advertising is very expensive—if you don't have hundreds of thousands of dollars for this strategy, you probably don't have enough. If you do opt for a mass-marketing strategy, you will have to make some targeted choices for where you want to run the advertising: be sure to locate it where there is the largest concentration of providers to create an association between them and your QRIS to yield the most impact.

If budget allows, combining both strategies for the campaign is ideal. However, if you must choose, focus on a community-based model of targeted marketing. Not only does this option have great impact and offer flexibility for your budget, but it also gives the most bang for your buck. Why? Because this approach targets not only parents who have young children and the people who interact with them, but it also allows the most re-use of the marketing materials you develop.

While deciding which marketing strategy to use—targeted or mass-market or both—consider the impact of each for your specific audiences, and the costs to implement the campaign. And keep in mind that your total costs for developing materials will include a wide variety of services (design, copywriting, printing/production, website development, postage, and photography at a minimum), so creating materials that have more than one use will save you both time and money.

## What's Next in This Series?

[In Part 2 of this series](#), learn more about the kinds of marketing materials you'll need and factors which can affect your cost for creating them.

## About Orange Square

Orange Square is dedicated to improving the lives of children and their families by combining your expertise in QRIS with our expertise in marketing communications and the QRIS National Learning Network.

Together with you, we work to improve the quality of early care and education by building public awareness and engagement.



Learn more about our services and knowledge on QRIS marketing communications at [orangesquare.com/QRIS](http://orangesquare.com/QRIS)



Join our LinkedIn group dedicated to QRIS marketing and communications at [linkedin.com/groups/8540612](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8540612)



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