

COMMUNICATING TO PARENTS ABOUT QRIS

Part **2** of 4



Detailing Tactics and Calculating Costs

What you'll learn...

In Part 2 of this series, learn how to develop a communications strategy and identify specific tactics for a successful parent campaign as a way to reach audiences with your message. And read about the kinds of marketing materials needed for each audience.

Recap

In Part 1 of this series, we discussed how to create a communications framework for reaching out to parents.

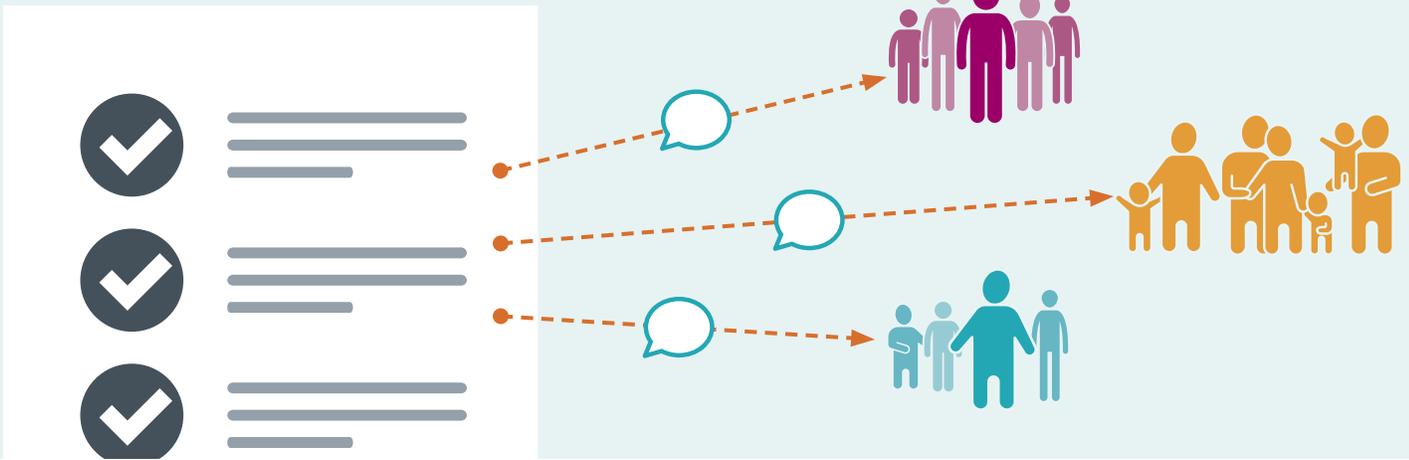
In Part 2, we'll review strategy and tactics, as well as the kinds of marketing materials needed to reach each audience.

By now, you've developed an overall communications framework for your parent outreach campaign (see [Part 1 of this series](#) for more information) and are ready to move ahead and connect parents with your state's quality rating and improvement system. The next step is to create a detailed communications strategy outlining the specific tactics needed for your communications, and calculate costs for executing this phase of your campaign.

Do you really *need* a communications strategy for your quality rating and improvement system? Definitely. Though some stakeholders may not immediately recognize its importance in the success of your QRIS, this strategy is the roadmap used to guide your efforts, and it establishes the benchmarks used to define success.

Exactly how do you create a communications strategy for your QRIS?

[Read on...](#)



The Process

[Part 1 of this series](#) identified three audiences for your parent outreach efforts (Providers, Parents, and Family Influencers), and answered questions like “what do they care about?” and “where do they get their information?” With that background in mind, you can develop a detailed plan that aligns your QRIS goals with target audiences, outreach methods, and specific tactics, and identifies details such as who will do the work and how many of each piece you’ll need to produce. (Refer to [Part 4 of this series](#) for more information on execution and distribution.)

We followed this process in creating a communications strategy for parent outreach as part of our work with BrightStars—Rhode Island’s quality rating and improvement system. To clarify the process described in this whitepaper series, we’ll use that experience to illustrate how these steps came to life with the BrightStars project.

Creating a Communications Strategy for BrightStars

Initially, your parent audience is likely unaware of quality rating and improvement systems; and even if they do know about your state’s QRIS, they may be unsure why such a system is important. With that in mind, **your messaging for all parent-focused outreach communications should consider both:**

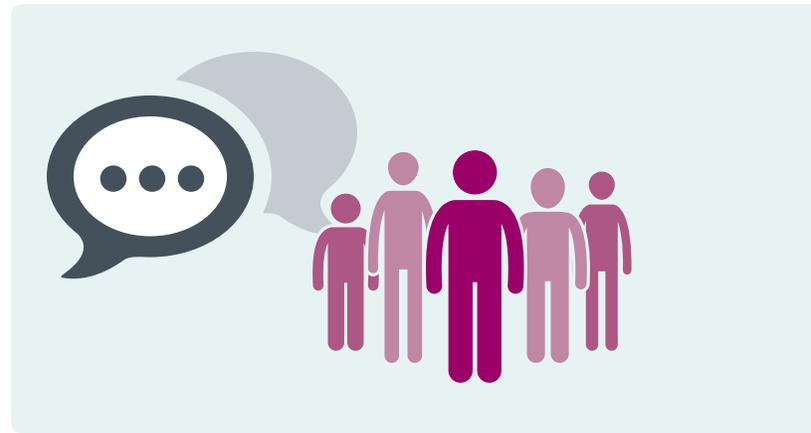
- a) What information is needed by parents of young children to decide on a program—so you can tell them what they need to know
- b) Where these parents go to get information they’ll use to decide which program is right for their family—so you know what marketing materials will be most effective

In the case of BrightStars, it was a relatively new QRIS and many local parents were unfamiliar with the concept of a quality rating and improvement system. To reach them both directly and indirectly through each of our three audiences (Parents, Providers, and Family Influencers), we first had to determine the information each audience would need, then develop the specific tactics appropriate for each situation.

With an understanding of where and how parents get information for choosing and finding early care and education, our communications strategy for BrightStars involved several tactics and relevant marketing materials. (Refer to [Part 3 of this series](#) to see some of the materials we created.)

Those tactics included:

- Developing a peer referral plan leveraging the parents whose children already attended programs where providers were enrolled in the QRIS
- Engaging in community-based targeted marketing with a focus on family influencers
- Creating a significant online presence with:
 - A robust BrightStars website that could deliver the information and materials parents need to research and evaluate programs—meeting parents in a place they're already searching
 - Paid banner ads on Facebook targeting parents of young children in Rhode Island
 - Digital ads that would display on websites commonly visited by Rhode Island families with children aged 0-5



Communicating with Providers Focused on Early Care and Education

Given that providers who are participating in a state's quality rating and improvement system already know about it *and* they have frequent direct contact with parents, this audience plays a pivotal role in any family-facing communication strategy.

In Rhode Island, enrollment was mandated for BrightStars so the focus of our outreach to providers was to build their understanding of the system and give them added value for participating. As part of that initial outreach, we developed materials that providers could give to parents—identifying that they participated in the system and were committed to quality; these pieces helped providers promote their program and outlined for parents how BrightStars could help them.

Developing these materials for providers ensured that the BrightStars message was consistent with the brand identity and it gave the participating providers advertising materials they could use for their own program. The materials were given to providers at no cost, so they delivered a significant value-add to QRIS-participating providers.

This step was taken with providers early on, and it laid the foundation for communicating with parents in the future. (Learn more about this experience in our blog entitled [Offering Benefits to Providers Who Participate in Your QRIS—While Educating Parents and Families.](#))

As a result of that early work engaging with providers, our multifaceted parent outreach campaign focused less on education. Instead, we were able to concentrate our efforts on how to use this informed group to build powerful champions and strong connections to QRIS in Rhode Island.

Further, we learned that peer referrals (i.e., QRIS-savvy parents referring other parents) are especially valuable because they're based on personal experience. To facilitate these referrals, our initial provider outreach included parent-friendly materials that were relevant and informative, easy to understand, and memorable. That way, when parents were asked, "How did you find quality care for your child?", it was more likely that BrightStars would be their first thought.

For this provider audience, our BrightStars communications strategy focused on:

- Empowering providers and their parents to refer new parents and families
- Informing parents that their child's program is part of a quality rating system
- Creating "refer-a-friend" cards that providers could share with parents for them to distribute; these cards could be customized with the program's contact information—serving as free advertising for the program

To ensure that parents see and connect their child's program with Rhode Island's quality rating and improvement system, we developed specific marketing materials for program sites:

- Yard signs
- Window clings for doors and windows
- Posters
- Stickers for children that reinforce aspects of the QRIS
- Bumper stickers for program employees and parents



Communicating with Parents and Families of Children Aged 0-5

Clearly, parents are the critical audience for your communications strategy and, as noted above, getting this part right has potential for a longer-term payoff because informed parents will refer other parents.

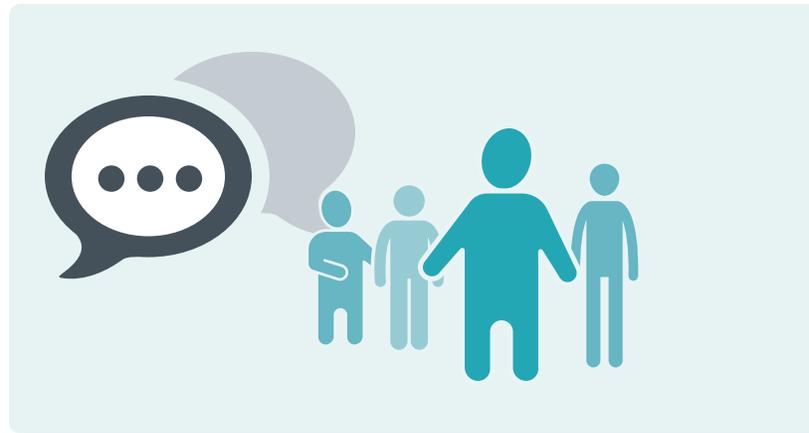
In terms of information needed, parents need to know what a quality rating and improvement system means, how to find a participating provider, and how a QRIS can help them choose a program that's right for their family.

For this parent audience, our BrightStars communications strategy focused on:

- Informing parents that their child’s program is part of a quality rating system
- Explaining to parents how the QRIS can help them select the right program for their family
- Using digital tools and social media—platforms that are convenient and available 24/7, and where parents are used to searching for information

To help parents associate BrightStars with the idea of quality improvements in early care and education in Rhode Island, we developed a variety of marketing materials:

- Parent-focused BrightStars website
- Digital banner ads
- Print ads in the *Rhode Island Family Guide*
- Magnets



Communicating with Family Influencers (people who interact with parents and families of children aged 0-5)

While this audience includes a variety of groups, you’ll need to address the same question in your communications with all of them: how much do they already know about a quality rating and improvement system and its ability to help parents find quality care?

Depending on the influencer, they may be well versed in your QRIS or may know nothing about it. Consequently, to get the most from this part of your investment, it makes sense to assume that the influencer—like the new-to-QRIS parent—is unfamiliar with quality rating and improvement systems. Just as you would with that parent, your communication should address both the “what” and the “why” of QRIS.

For this audience, our BrightStars communications strategy focused on informing each influencer:

- That BrightStars exists, and what a QRIS is

- That there is a website where parents and families can get more information and can search for quality-rated care for their children
- There are printed materials available for parents to learn more
- There is a toll-free number to call for help
- BrightStars has a quality checklist so parents know what questions to ask as they evaluate programs

As a key part of our community-based targeted marketing for BrightStars, we developed a detailed list of family influencers that intersect with parents of young children—categorizing them into three broad groups (refer to Part 1 for more detail):

- 1 Healthcare Influencers (like doctors, clinics, and hospitals)
- 2 Statewide-Service Influencers (including social service agencies and organizations that work with pregnant women, and with young children and their families)
- 3 Community-Based Influencers (such as libraries, museums, and the like)

Our comprehensive list included details like:

- The influencer's name
- A description of their services (i.e., specifically how they engage with parents or families of young children)
- The exact target market they serve (e.g., families with children 0-3, parents with newborns, low-income families with

children, children 0-3 with special needs, pregnant women with children 0-3, and so on)

- The marketing materials we would need for each; our array of materials included:
 - An info sheet to help them understand about BrightStars
 - Posters and flyers they could put up in their environments
 - Magnets for their office to keep the BrightStars QRIS top of mind
 - Pamphlets they could give to parents during a referral, or could make available in their office space (we also provided an acrylic display to hold the pamphlets)
 - Parent informational brochure (note that parents could also receive this piece by calling BrightStars' toll-free number)
 - The *Choosing an Early Care Program Checklist* for parents to use when evaluating a program (note that parents could use either a printed version or a digital version available on the website or via smartphone)

The list of marketing materials for Family Influencers needed to be extensive: not only did this audience reflect a variety of organizations and environments, but they were also tasked with (a) learning about BrightStars themselves, and (b) sharing materials to refer parents and families.



Estimating Costs for Your Parent Outreach Campaign

Once you've outlined in your communications strategy the specific groups you'll connect with, the full list of marketing materials you want to create, and the marketing materials needed for each audience, you're ready to start calculating costs for developing the marketing materials for your parent outreach campaign.

Here are some thoughts to consider as you develop the budget for this aspect of your outreach campaign:

- **Try to develop pieces that work for multiple audiences.** Creating multipurpose marketing pieces can result in significant cost savings and will ensure that the brand identity stays memorable.

For example, we developed a BrightStars general information brochure that is appropriate for both Parents and Family Influencers, as well as bumper stickers that can be used by both Providers and Parents to spread awareness of Rhode Island's work toward quality improvement in early care and education.

- When planning production of the various pieces, **anticipate how many of each piece you'll need longer-term.** Printing larger quantities will save money, so think about how you'll circulate the materials (refer to [Part 4 of this series](#) for more on this topic), and keep that information in mind as you estimate quantities for production.

When working on the BrightStars project, some pieces were assembled into kits and distributed to Providers at a series of training sessions held as part of the QRIS launch. Projecting the number of kits needed made it easier to determine quantities for that part of the effort.

- Another consideration is **digital availability of your marketing pieces**. If you'll create electronic versions or downloadable PDFs of some materials which parents can access online, that will affect not only how many are printed, but also how the design team creates those pieces.

In developing the BrightStars pieces, print quantities of the *Choosing an Early Care Program Checklist* reflected the fact that this piece is also available as a printable download and as an interactive tool that can be used via the website or a smartphone.

- In estimating your costs, be sure to **include all the tasks needed to create the marketing materials**. In addition to printing, remember to allow for services like design, copywriting, website development (i.e., the technical team that will actually build the site), postage if necessary, and photo shoots or image purchasing.

BrightStars's collaboration with a select team of professionals for this project centralized the work—providing seamless sharing of information and saving them valuable management time.

What's Next in This Series?

In Part 3 of this series, see how this process came to life for the parent campaign executed for BrightStars, Rhode Island's quality rating and improvement system.

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



Join our LinkedIn group dedicated to QRIS marketing and communications at linkedin.com/groups/8540612



For questions or to get in touch with us, email kristine@orangesquare.com



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