CHAPTER II: EFFECTIVE OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Introduction

The focus of Chapter I of the Toolkit was to guide your organization through negotiating, forming, and maintaining partnerships with other organizations that are key allies. Chapter II of the Toolkit is designed to help your organization bolster your efforts on forming relationships with individuals in your community. To do so, this chapter will provide information, resources and tools that will assist your organization to first understand the dynamics of your community and subsequently develop effective strategies for community outreach and engagement.

For those who work in the adolescent pregnancy prevention and parenting field, it is essential to have a robust understanding of the particular community you work with. Taking the time to get to know your community assets and deficiencies is crucial, because engaging the community in your efforts to improve services will require that you are familiar with the people, the issues, and the history of the community. This chapter will provide methodologies to help you increase your organization's understanding of the community you serve and conversely design strategies to enhance the community's general knowledge of your organization's mission and goals. Strategies for coordinating your outreach to community members, engaging your staff in outreach efforts, and setting objectives for your outreach efforts are also included. The tools and resources provided with this chapter will supply your organization with worksheets, assessment tools, and examples to enhance your understanding of your community and facilitate your implementation of effective outreach strategies to engage community members in support of your efforts.

The case study at the end of the chapter centers on a community-based organization that coordinates local teenage pregnancy prevention services. In spite of its wide range of members and diverse representation of local groups, the organization's community continued to experience a climbing teenage pregnancy rate. The program was also faced with issues stemming from their community's unemployment rate and low high school graduation rate. The case study details the organization's efforts to perform a community assessment in order to delve deeper into their community's issues, and describes the organization's subsequent campaign to leverage their community's assets and strengths.

At-a-Glance

This chapter provides strategies to:
- *Increase your organization's understanding of the community you serve*
- *Enhance the community's general knowledge of your organization's mission*
- *Maintain these partnerships in a way that is mutually beneficial to both parties*
- *Coordinate your outreach to community members*
- *Set objectives for outreach efforts*
- *Engage your staff in outreach efforts*

The following index outlines the content of the chapter:

Performing a Community Assessment to Support Outreach Efforts

Community Assessments

In order to enhance your outreach efforts, you should understand how community needs and trends affect your services. This information will contribute to the overall success of your outreach strategy. A community assessment process can also provide the baseline rationale for creating new programs and eliminating duplication of services and programs. Some of the following information can help your organization obtain more accurate insights into your community:

- Demographic data (e.g., age, race, socioeconomic and educational attainment data, family structure, and language use)Homelessness statistics
- Substance abuse trends
- Teen pregnancy statistics
- Other service providers' attitudes and policies about pregnant and parenting teens
- Geographic boundaries of the community
- Length of time the community has been in existence
- General history of the community
- Key people and leaders in the community
- Issues of most concern to the community
- Morale and involvement levels
- Key allies and rivals

A community assessment will help your organization's overall outreach efforts by mapping trends, getting to know key players in your neighborhood and community, and collecting information about other services that are available in the community. The assessment process can be a good opportunity to showcase your organization and its programs and services as well as build trust within the community. A community assessment will also be essential in understanding community strengths. For example, despite high adolescent pregnancy rates, the community may have low premature birth rates. A community assessment will aid in identifying and delineating these strengths in order to build on your organization's understanding of the community.

The formal approach to a community assessment entails review of data and statistics as well as potentially running your own survey of the community. While this can be costly, city and county health boards, school boards, and public health agencies often have some of this information publicly available. You can also search the federal government's website http://www.data.gov for useful health-related information, http://2010.census.gov/2010census/data/ for 2010 Census Data, or the American Community Survey at http://www.census.gov/acs/www/. Assessing this information can help you target your own survey to fill in any gaps.

The informal approach to community assessments focuses on building relationships with other organizations in the community and pooling knowledge and insight. This includes connecting with those public agencies that have data publicly available as well as non-governmental organizations that have compiled their own statistics

or could compare anecdotal information with you. Having a group of organizations pool information on their clients can result in a useful body of data that can guide coordinated program, funding, and outreach decisions.

Whether you do a formal or informal assessment, the community assessment will require your organization to engage in and maintain an ongoing dialogue with community members. The findings of the assessment can help you better build and frame awareness of your program and services. The *Preliminary Community Engagement Strategy* tool on page 38 guides you through the questions and priorities that your organization should be aware of in developing your community outreach strategies.

Leveraging Community Assets to Support Community Engagement

Community Assets

While a community assessment typically focuses on identifying gaps in services in the community, another key factor that will contribute to the development of successful outreach strategies for community engagement is gaining an understanding of your community's existing resources or assets and leveraging them to support your outreach efforts. The members of your organization can be more powerful community actors when they are not exclusively focused on needs, problems, and deficiencies.[vi]

> ### *Key Term: Community Assets*
>
> Anything that is used to improve the quality of community life.

A community asset or resource is anything that is used to improve the quality of community life.[vii] Broadly defined, there are five different categories of community assets. These include:

1. *Local residents*: their skills, experiences, passions, capacities and willingness to contribute to the project.
2. *Local voluntary associations, clubs, and networks*: e.g., all of the athletic, cultural, social, faith-based, groups powered by volunteer members – which might contribute to the project.
3. *Local institutions*: e.g., public institutions such as schools, libraries, parks, police stations, along with local businesses and non-profits – which might contribute to the project.
4. *Physical assets*: e.g., the land, the buildings, the infrastructure, transportation, etc. which might contribute to the project.
5. *Economic assets:* e.g., what people produce and consume, businesses, informal economic exchanges, barter relationships[viii] – which might contribute to the project.

These assets can be used by your organization to meet community needs and improve community life. They are especially important when external resources (e.g., federal and state money) are not available or are not specifically targeted for the services you wish to implement or the population you wish to reach. Identifying and mobilizing community assets enables community residents to better influence, gain control and become active shapers of change. Improvement efforts are more effective and longer-lasting when they are from programs based on assessment efforts that focused on gaps between what a community has/d (assets) and what it needs/ed (deficits) to achieve the desired change. *Community Assets: Potential Uses and Engagement Strategies,* located on page 40 in the Tools and Resources, contains a list of potential ideas your organization can utilize to engage and mobilize your community's assets in order to further your efforts.

In summary, understanding community assets plays a critical role in outreach because: a) it allows your organization to better target gaps or factors that limit your capacity to be effective; b) it provides a means to cost-effectively enhance your efforts through the use of existing resources and c) by their very nature, community-assets are already being used to form and maintain efforts that increase the probability of your outreach strategies and tactics to be successfully implemented.

Implementing Community Outreach Strategies

An outreach strategy is a way in which your key messages are delivered. Every conversation about your organization is an opportunity to deliver these messages; if your outreach efforts can successfully incorporate your mission and goals into your communications, more people hear your messages over time and come to recognize your organization.

The term "strategic communications" encompasses the means – the plans, goals, practices, and tools – by which an organization delivers consistent messages about its mission and values to its key target audiences and partners. Community outreach is strategic when it is integrated, orchestrated, and ongoing. The various pieces of your outreach strategy should "fit" together, complement and reinforce each other; and not contradict or unnecessarily repeat each other.

Organizations sometimes struggle to clearly articulate values and mission in a way that enables distinct target audiences to relate to your mission, connect to your values, trust in your services, and take action to support your organization. It is important to remember that community outreach is not about sound bites, glitzy brochures, fancy annual reports, and animated websites. Your organization's outreach strategy should focus on advancing your mission, advancing support for your work, and increasing awareness in the community.

Strategic communications are critical to your outreach strategy because, if done right, they can help you strengthen your partnerships and increase awareness by: persuading, moving, and convincing your target audiences to help your organization achieve its mission.

Engage your Human Resources in your Outreach Strategies

As employees of a community organization dependent upon philanthropy and public funding, increasing awareness of and support for your program is part of every staff member's job, without exception. Strategic communications provides a framework that ensures every staff and board member is working from the same set of assumptions and understands how their work relates to your organization's core values and goals.

Your employees and Board members interact with current and potential clients, other organizations, funders, and the general public on a daily basis. Ensuring that they can communicate how important your work is to the community is vital to your success. They are already positioned to reach a number of your target audiences. Doing so will help you build public understanding, confidence, trust and can better prepare you to deal with routine challenges. In unexpected circumstances, it may even help your organization be better equipped to address and overcome a crisis.

Strategic communications can be employed across your organization with all staff to:

- *Help set priorities and provide future direction.* As strategic communications become integrated, the staff will be selective about developing projects that are within the scope of the strategic

communications plan. Board members will begin to think more strategically about how they can integrate their other community ties into the organization's work.

- *Improve performance and stimulate creative thinking.* With everyone focused on the importance of certain audiences and what actions the organization wants from those audiences, it is easier to focus planning and creativity on common goals.
- *Build teamwork and expertise.* When highlighting the synergy of communications activity, staff and board begin to collaborate and share information in new ways. They look for ways to set priorities, coordinate resource allocation, and improve internal communications.

Your organization should strive for all staff and Board members to know the right message, use the right channels and ultimately be the right messengers. This will require you to equip your staff and Board members with the tools and skills to know the audience they are addressing, know the needs of the audience, know how to communicate with them and know the importance of their work as it relates to your organization's mission. In turn, your staff and Board will be more credible to the audience; they will feel that they know them and be more inclined to trust their message.

The worksheets *My Organization and its Community Outreach Activities* and *Priority Communities for My Outreach* on page 41 and 42, included in the Tools and Resources, guide you through the questions and priorities that your organization should be aware of in developing your community outreach strategies. It is essential to begin with outlining your purpose or goals for engaging the community, defining the optimal scope of your outreach and generating the objectives and strategies that will achieve your desired outcomes.

Set SMART Objectives for your Outreach Strategies

During the course of planning your outreach efforts you identify critical areas for strategic communication and define communication objectives that will result in the outcomes you desire as the objectives are operationalized. In order to increase the effectiveness of your objectives, it is important to make your objectives SMART. That is, objectives should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound. Having SMART objectives makes it easier to clearly define what you are supposed to achieve through implementation of the objective, hence facilitating the monitoring and evaluation process. An example of a SMART communication objective can be "distribute outreach material to 70% of all women in the community between the age of 13 and 19 by the end of the next year."

> ### *Key Term: SMART Objectives*
>
> SMART Objectives are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound

Your communication objectives should address issues such as awareness, knowledge, attitude, practice, behavior and participation. Each of these represents a communication level, which needs to be dealt with separately. If for instance your objective is to induce change in behavior, first you need to make individuals aware that there is a problem with the previous behavior. You then take steps to ensure that the knowledge and the attitude necessary for the change to take place are present. It is only when all these prerequisites are met that you can hope to achieve your communication objectives. [ix]

Chapter II: Effective Outreach Strategies

The worksheet *Develop SMART Communications Objectives* on page 43 in the Tools and Resources can guide your organization through the brainstorming and development of SMART objectives.