



chapter

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Expanding Reach and Influence Through Partnerships

United we stand, divided we fall. Birds of a feather flock together. Two heads are better than one. Many hands make light work. Strength lies in numbers. By forging communication-focused workgroups and partnerships to promote policy or cardiovascular health and related environmental change, you and your program staff will realize the wisdom and accuracy of these adages.



Workgroups (stakeholder partnerships) are critical in the process of policy and environmental change. When lawmakers and other decision-making authorities see broad support for an issue or cause, they pay close attention and often take action, particularly when the issue, such as CVH, affects a large segment of the general population. Advocacy efforts are strengthened when a diverse and influential group of individuals or organizations pools skills, resources, and political clout to achieve common social objectives.¹ (See chart below on *Characteristics of Ideal Communication Partners.*)

TIPS

CHARACTERISTICS OF IDEAL COMMUNICATION PARTNERS

- Commitment to achieving shared vision, goals, and objectives
- Credibility in the community
- Specialized skills to assist CVH communication efforts
- Involvement with and access to key target audiences (e.g., news media, legislators, regulators, business leaders)
- Willingness to share resources and expertise
- Flexibility
- Capacity to function as a viable team member
- Strong work ethic
- Acceptance of responsibility and recognition
- History of working with the State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program and/or related programs addressing chronic disease
- Support from organizational leadership
- No obvious conflicts of interest

BUILD A COMMUNICATION WORKGROUP

To maximize the influence and reach of communication efforts related to CVH policy and environmental change, you need to join forces with individuals and groups that share your interest in promoting heart-healthy and stroke-free states. An important first step is to identify, approach, and recruit a wide range of CVH supporters at state and local levels who are interested in and well positioned to promote initiatives to advance policy and environmental change.

IDENTIFY VIABLE PARTNERS FOCUSED ON COMMUNICATION

Communication partners can be recruited from two primary sources: (1) associates you have already engaged in state heart disease and stroke prevention activities and (2) nonaffiliated individuals and organizations you believe will add value to your communication effort.

Involve Current Partners

Start by assessing your universe of partners in the heart disease and stroke prevention program at state and local levels, and determine which individuals and/or organizations are best suited to collaborate on a communication effort.

The needs and interests of your existing partners likely will vary. An organization's willingness to support a particular CVH project does not guarantee that it will be receptive to serving in your communication workgroup. By the same token, you may decide that a partner in the State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program is highly suitable for an existing project but cannot provide the specialized skills, resources, or professional contacts needed for a communication effort to achieve policy and environmental change. (See chart on left on *Characteristics of Ideal Communication Partners.*) Evaluate the



strengths of your existing partners. Also, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have they played an effective role in past or present initiatives of the State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program?
- Have they consistently fulfilled expectations? Are they reliable, accessible, and committed to supporting efforts of the State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program over the long term?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- What are their current activities, strategies, and policies in relation to CVH? Do they have documented success in achieving the goals of their efforts? Would any of their skills, resources, or professional associations benefit from communication activities?
- How do they relate to and interact with staff of the State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program and other partners? Has their partners' involvement reinforced the project team's cohesion?
- Do they have experience communicating for CVH policy and environmental change?

TIPS

FORMING PARTNERSHIPS

Partners can come from organizations that are obvious sources of help and others that are not as obvious. You may be working on activities related to heart health and stroke with the American Heart Association, the National Stroke Association, or both. In addition, however, a number of organizations with a primary mission other than prevention of heart disease have goals or activities related to cardiovascular health. Categories of organizations you may want to approach to be part of your workgroup include the following:

- Health care providers and related professional associations (e.g., medical, hospital, nursing, pharmacy, and primary care associations);
- Health care payers (e.g., managed care organizations, employer-sponsored health plans);
- Organizations representing priority populations (e.g., National Black Nurses Association, Federally Funded Health Centers, and National Alliance for Hispanic Health);
- Health foundations (e.g., organizers and sources of funding for interventions);
- Schools (e.g., state education agency);
- Elected officials (e.g., legislators, governor, mayor, city council, and school board members);
- Businesses (e.g., chambers of commerce, public relations and advertising agencies, and the largest private sector employers with employee health care plans);
- State departments and agencies (e.g., parks and recreation, education, and transportation);
- Non-health associations (associations for professions other than health care) (e.g., real estate/urban planning, travel/tourism, environmental/outdoor recreation and transportation);
- Religious organizations (e.g., statewide councils of churches, synagogues, and mosques);
- Service organizations (e.g., groups for youth, adults, or seniors and civic associations); and
- Consumers (e.g., individuals and their friends, families, co-workers, and neighbors affected by CVD).

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If so, what did these efforts entail? Were they successful?

- In view of their volume of commitments, how much time are they likely able to commit to the workgroup?

Seek New Partners

As you develop a list of existing partners who may be appropriate to join your workgroup, pay close attention to the mix of associates that you are compiling:

- Are the potential workgroup members complementary in their goals, yet diverse in the type of organization represented?

SUCCESS STORIES

HEART DISEASE AND STROKE: SOUTH CAROLINA

The Tobacco Control Program of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environment Control is working in close partnership with the statewide Tobacco Collaborative to advocate for the Smoke-Free Charleston Project. Community-level support is being garnered through educational efforts to promote smoke-free work sites, including restaurants and bars. Citizens across the state are becoming vocal and visible advocates to propel this policy change into action and to help prevent and reduce “environmental harm” (secondhand smoke) to others. South Carolina’s Tobacco Control Program was asked to provide testimony on science and data pertaining to this environmental harm. Community-level advocacy activities have included letters to the editor, letters to the City of Charleston City Council, and Town Hall meetings. The grassroots advocacy effort has acquired support from the Charleston mayor and several City Council members.

- Does your list encompass every type of individual and organization that you are seeking to involve?
- Have you included representatives of every audience your communication initiative will target? Whom are you leaving out?

You may wish to consider various types of partners for the workgroup, to ensure representation, outreach, and expertise. (*See [hart on Forming Partnerships on page 19.](#)*)

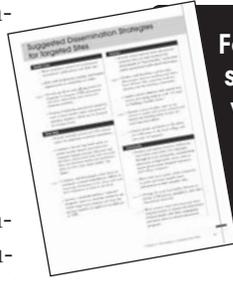
Compare your list of viable existing partners with the full spectrum of potential partners. Identify where gaps exist, and investigate individuals and organizations that may be worth approaching. You may also want to consult several partners regardless of whether you invite the current partners to serve on the workgroup. For suggestions of, or referrals to, new potential program partners, keep in mind that your recruitment efforts may change over time. Once you’ve engaged a core group of members and started planning your communication initiative, you are likely to identify opportunities for securing additional partners who can support specific strategies and tactics.

APPROACH POTENTIAL WORKGROUP MEMBERS FOR BUY-IN

After completing your list of potential members, schedule face-to-face meetings to introduce the communication initiative, and invite them to participate. Point out the areas of shared interest and explain how they relate to the CVH initiative. As you discuss the concept of promoting CVH policy and environmental change through communication activities, it may be helpful to describe successful cases.

In your approach, define the value of the partnership exchange — what’s in it for each potential workgroup member. You may decide to provide a document that details the purpose of your efforts on policy

and environmental change, how members can contribute to the initiative, and how they may benefit from being involved. You may also want to incorporate model selling points for promoting CVH policy and environmental change into your pitches to potential partners about communication. (See chart on *Selling Points to Potential Partners* on pages 23–24.)



For suggested dissemination strategies for targeted health care, work sites, schools, and community sites, see *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on page 101.



The main reason to join a workgroup is that the benefits are likely to outweigh the costs of participating.² Many workgroups fail when the costs of participation, particularly time, greatly outweigh the benefits of being part of the workgroup. Carefully assess the needs of potential members, and determine how the workgroup’s activities will help them achieve their objectives. Discuss ways the communication initiative will strengthen your partners’ efforts to promote CVH and present heightened visibility and partnership opportunities. Talk to each potential partner about your expectations, provide options, and try to determine how much of a commitment each can make.

For a tool to assess workgroup status, see *Chapter 7: Tools and Resources* on pages 103–104.



Following is a sample of the many ways in which you can engage your existing and potential partners in promoting communication interventions that support policy and environmental change as part of your workgroup. (See *Chapters 4, 5, and 6* for guidance on developing, implementing, and evaluating specific communication tools and tactics.)

“By utilizing the most promising communication practices, State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Programs can translate basic science into messages that educate the public about healthy lifestyle choices, as well as inform decision makers of the importance of executing policy and environmental changes. Strategic communication in health care, work sites, schools, and community settings will support population-based interventions for blood pressure control, high cholesterol control, emergency response, awareness of signs and symptoms of heart attacks and stroke, quality of care, and elimination of disparities.”

—George Mensab, Chief, CVH Branch, CDC

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Message Development

Draw on the communication expertise of your workgroup members to craft appropriate messages for each of your target audiences. Representatives of the target sites (health care, work, school, and community) can be of great value in this process.

Message Dissemination

- Place newsletter articles in workgroup members' publications.
- Give presentations at members' chapter meetings.
- Provide data for members to write Op-Eds and letters to the editor.
- Create a subcommittee of media relations staff to cultivate the best relationships with target media and to assign media outreach activities.

- Create a Web site on your policy or environmental change initiative, and encourage all your partners to link to and promote the site.
- Elicit in-kind support from members to design and print materials.

EVALUATE WORKGROUP EFFORTS

After you have assembled the workgroup with both existing and new partners and initiated the planning efforts, establish a system for long-term assessment of the structure, working relationships, and overall effectiveness of the workgroup. (This method of process evaluation is discussed in Chapter 4.) This exercise will help to ensure that your workgroup maintains harmony, a balance of responsibility, and a high level of motivation among its members, all of which ultimately will promote a successful initiative. Frequent two-way communication with the members of your workgroup will enable you



TIPS

KEEPING YOUR WORKGROUP MEMBERS ENGAGED

- **Call members periodically to find out how their work is progressing.** Offer assistance when appropriate, congratulate and thank them for their achievements, and show interest in the work they do on behalf of their organization.
- **Involve members in workgroup-related activities.** Make sure they are aware of all scheduled meetings, special events, and evaluation processes. If they are unable to participate in an activity, provide them with a verbal or written debriefing and copies of materials.
- **Update members regularly on the communication effort.** Provide verbal reports by conference calls and in-person meetings. You can also circulate a newsletter or other written communication through regular mail or e-mail. Tell them about program changes that may affect their organization.
- **Enhance the visibility of members.** Credit them in your news releases and other communication materials and at special events. If you generate a story that mentions them, send them a copy.
- **Provide materials and resources.** When you encounter breaking news and information that is of interest to their organization, be sure to alert them to it. Send written materials when possible.
- **Share results.** Whether positive or negative, be sure to circulate information about the results of the communication effort, including feedback from formal program evaluation.
- **Explore ways to extend collaboration.** Look for additional opportunities to partner with members. Consider providing support for their organization's projects.

to evaluate how the work is progressing. In addition to conducting regular telephone and face-to-face meetings, you may wish to arrange for members to complete a partnership

evaluation form every few months or every quarter, to gauge their perceptions of and contributions to the workgroup and obtain feedback for enhancing the team effort.

TIPS

SELLING POINTS TO POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Health Care Providers and Associations

- **Save money and improve health.** Improvement in CVH may decrease the duration of hospital stays, reduce health care costs, and improve patient outcomes.
- **Strengthen community relations.** Heighten your organization's visibility as a leader in building healthy communities.
- **Make new alliances.** Forge relationships with new partners to promote a heart-healthy and stroke-free community and state.

Health Care Payers

- **Reinforce efforts to reduce health care costs through prevention.** CVH policy and environmental changes can improve quality of care and lessen the CVD burden, lowering health care costs.
- **Enhance corporate image.** Your presence in this workgroup will signify your commitment to promoting community health through education and policy and environmental supports.

Organizations Representing Priority Populations

- **Play an active role in reducing health disparities.** By participating in this communication effort, you will help to promote CVH environmental and policy changes that can improve your constituents' quality of life.
- **Ensure that constituencies are represented in this important health promotion effort.** This group will enable you to serve as a voice for all the people you represent in your day-to-day advocacy efforts, ensuring that their CVH needs and interests are recognized and addressed.

Health Foundations

- **Facilitate linkages between community CVH efforts.** By joining this effort, you can reinforce and call greater attention to your pilot projects and interventions to prevent heart disease and stroke.
- **Network and identify opportunities for developing new programs.** By associating your organization with a wide range of CVH-promoting interests, you may uncover specific CVH issues and experts your organization may wish to work with to champion your cause.

Schools

- **Build healthy students.** Promote healthy school environments to increase student capacity to learn, reduce absenteeism, and improve physical fitness and mental alertness.
- **Reinforce the teaching community's role in health promotion.** Your participation will support educators' efforts to incorporate important health information into curriculum and will facilitate healthy learning environments.

Elected Officials

- **Lower public health insurance costs.** Healthier environments create healthier citizens, reducing the drain on Medicaid and other public health programs.
- **Attract new businesses and jobs.** By promoting a healthier workforce, policy and environmental changes can facilitate economic growth in your state.
- **Develop model programs with federal support.** Your state can be a leader in developing federally funded programs and policies to encourage healthy lifestyles.

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SELLING POINTS TO POTENTIAL PARTNERS *continued from page 23*

Businesses

- **Help to keep employees at work.** CVD can cause extensive absenteeism of workers. Improving heart health will help to keep employees on the job.
- **Improve your bottom line.** CVD imposes significant health care and disability management costs on employers — particularly for larger businesses that tend to be self-insured.
- **Better health means better business.** Involvement in this effort can strengthen your company's reputation and goodwill; provide greater access to key customer groups; and heighten employee motivation, morale, and retention.

State Departments and Agencies

- **Network to promote a host of community interests.** The relationships you establish with members of the workgroup may facilitate long-term partnerships that can further advance your efforts to promote community activity.
- **Heighten community participation in park and recreation activities.** By participating in this CVH communication initiative,

you can actively promote the benefits of regular exercise, encouraging members of your community to visit state parks and take part in state recreational programs.

Nonhealth Associations, Religious Organizations, Service Organizations, and Consumers

- **Help to educate the public at large about the importance of CVH.** Your knowledge, insight, and connections to the community can help enable populations to maintain heart-healthy lifestyles and garner their support for petitions for policy and environmental change related to CVH.
- **Fulfill your mission to promote healthier communities.** By incorporating your direct and/or indirect experiences with CVD into this effort, you can actively appeal to lawmakers and other key decision makers for positive change in health systems.
- **Strengthen constituent and community relations.** Your support for this effort will enhance your image as a leader in promoting healthy, happy, and active communities.