

Stories from the Field: Indiana



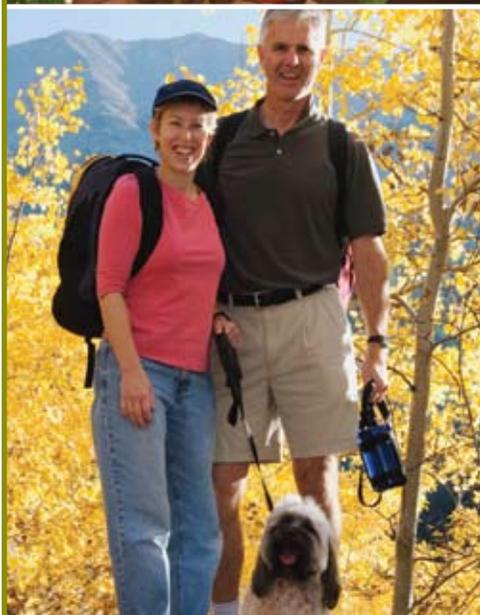
Developing a Diverse Taskforce to Tackle Obesity

Engaging community partners is hard work, and the work is even harder after a loss of momentum and a change in leadership. When the state of Indiana decided not to move forward with its extensive statewide obesity prevention plan in late 2007, the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity (DNPA) of the Indiana State Department of Health was left with this very challenge: reengaging with its obesity prevention taskforce members and finding ways to enlist the support of new members. Reengaging with partners taskforce members to push the obesity prevention plan forward was critical—according to 2009 data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 30% of the Hoosier state’s adults report being obese, making heart disease, cancer, and stroke the top three causes of death in Indiana.

While many people might give up at the mere thought of having to re-enlist supporters again after a setback, staff of the Indiana DNPA found ways to reinvigorate the taskforce members they already had and bring on even more members, this time from a wider array of nontraditional partners.

Tagging on to an event hosted for the acting Surgeon General, the DNPA held their first obesity prevention taskforce meeting with charter members. The event quickly rekindled the excitement that had been previously generated and sparked the energy to motivate charter taskforce members to recruit new members. As a result, many new and nontraditional partners joined the group: transportation representatives, city planners, local foundation members, representatives from chambers of commerce, and members of business and restaurant associations.

Three additional taskforce meetings were held that year, each with an increasing number of members attending. While the first meeting had 67 attendees, more than 100 attendees were at the final meeting. Momentum had been fully regained, despite initial fears that reengaging with members or finding interested new members would be difficult.



One of the greatest challenges during meetings was finding ways to efficiently welcome and orient new members without spending too much time sharing information known to existing members. To meet this challenge, DNPA leadership dedicated time at the start of each meeting to briefly review items discussed at the previous meeting. Following the short review, the meeting focused on current business. Additionally, DNPA staff created a website to organize all information and presentations given at previous meetings so members could easily access taskforce documentation. As of March 2011, the taskforce has had five meetings and boasts 131 active members. The taskforce is now finishing the new state obesity prevention plan and laying the groundwork for implementation.

Importance of Early Success

The development of the Indiana taskforce has served as the foundation for a coordinated response in identifying collaborative, nontraditional approaches to addressing obesity in the state.



Lessons Learned

- Create buy-in: personally meet with potential partners to better understand their interests and work in obesity prevention.
- Develop a formal partnership recruitment process to capture important partner information (i.e., contact information, areas of expertise, and specific interest areas).



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