

Implementing Prevention-Based Behavioral Health Initiatives for Young People



CULTURALLY COMPETENT OUTREACH: APPLYING SOCIAL MARKETING TECHNIQUES

Effective communication is a critical part of promoting mental, emotional, and behavioral (MEB) health, and preventing MEB disorders. Successful outreach depends on how well you engage and motivate the people you are trying to reach—your audiences.

The process of identifying critical audiences and then working to understand them and how they consume information is a foundation of social marketing. Social marketing applies commercial marketing strategies to social issues, with the goal of changing ideas, attitudes, and behaviors. Used successfully around the world to address health challenges such as smoking cessation and family planning, social marketing efforts include traditional communications tactics such as grassroots outreach, media relations, public service advertising, and materials development. These tactics are arrived at as part of a planning process that begins with setting a goal and objectives, identifying audiences, and defining and talking with those audiences to determine the most effective way to reach them and achieve campaign goals. Social marketing efforts are also evaluated and adjusted over time.

The use of social marketing in public health campaigns has been widely studied, and its effectiveness for spurring changes in behavior among a range of audiences has been proven time and again.^{1,2,3,4,5} Social marketing's reliance on thorough and specific audience information allows practitioners to "speak the language" of the targeted group in order to more effectively influence change.

Since social marketing's ultimate goal is to change behavior, it is important to be sure the resources are in place to support that new behavior. For example, if you want to encourage youth to seek services at a local community center, be sure the center is accessible, appropriately staffed, linguistically competent, and adapted to meet the targeted audience's cultural needs.

This guide includes step-by-step instructions to develop and execute social marketing efforts that are effective in promoting mental health and preventing MEB disorders.

To begin outreach, consider these steps:

1. Plan your approach.

- Set goals and objectives for your effort.

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- Your goal is the outcome you want from your efforts.
- When developing your goal, consider following SMART goal guidelines: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-bound.
- Establish objectives that will serve as the individual milestones you follow to meet the goal.
- Conversations with stakeholders can help you clarify goals and objectives.
- Define the audience.
 - Since there are many subgroups within each community, narrow the audience as much as possible.
 - Identify subgroups based on common characteristics relevant to the behavior to be changed, such as age, location, socio-economic status, education level, behaviors, and attitudes.
 - Consider reaching out to those who have the most influence within each subgroup.
 - Once you narrow the audience, research what their beliefs are about mental health or substance use and about the behavior you wish to change. Learn about the audience’s characteristics, needs, strengths, and challenges, as well as where and how they typically receive health-related information.
- Talk to the audience.
 - When possible, use discussion groups to gain insight from key audiences.
 - During the discussion groups, learn as much as you can about the community’s knowledge and perceptions of mental health and substance use.

2. Define your message and channels.

- Develop the message.
 - Use language and terminology that resonates with the target audience.
 - Be clear about what you would like audiences to do by including a “call to action.”

What is prevention? Interventions that occur prior to the onset of a disorder that are intended to prevent or reduce risk for the disorder.

What is promotion? In the context of mental health, **promotion** interventions aim to enhance individuals’ ability to achieve developmentally appropriate tasks and a positive sense of self-esteem, mastery, well-being, and social inclusion, and strengthen their ability to cope with adversity.

Source: Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities.

- Choose appropriate communication channels.
 - Defining the audience and understanding how they receive information is critical in helping you choose the most effective channels and activities for reaching your audience. A community or campus newspaper, moms' listserv, and salon are all channels that can be used to reach audiences. Also consider social media channels if your audience is young adults.
 - Many people mistakenly equate social marketing efforts with public service announcement (PSA) campaigns. While PSAs can be effective tools, the best activities are those that are most effective in reaching your intended audience. Activities may be as simple as a PowerPoint presentation or a flier that is hung on a community bulletin board, or as targeted as a health fair at a local school.
 - Television can be an effective communication channel, but PSAs for this medium are expensive to produce. If television is the best way to reach the audience, consider a partnership with a local station that would help produce the spot and supply a spokesperson. Or if funds allow, develop a PSA and market it to a range of local channels.
 - Radio is most cost-effectively used through partnerships as well. Live announcer copy is inexpensive to develop and can be read by an on-air personality once you have built a relationship. Community events offer good opportunities to make connections with local broadcast outlets.

3. Develop and pre-test materials and activities.

- For some efforts, verbal communication via teleconference or presentation may be most effective.
- When developing materials, be sure to use spokespeople and visuals that resonate with your intended audience.
- For non-professional audiences, less text is usually better than more.
- Consider using brochures, fact sheets, direct mailings, billboards, and bus posters, as well as radio and television PSAs.
- Think ahead about where you are sending people for more information and do not overpromise—for example, make sure your Web site is continually updated to reflect your outreach.
- Pre-test.
 - Have audience members review and comment on the drafts of your materials and messaging.
 - Be sure to ask audience members to review the videos, photos, and designs you are using as well as verify the language.
- Revise materials after obtaining audience feedback.

4. Implement the social marketing strategy.

- Distribute through selected channels.
- Review activities and track audience reactions.
 - Interview members of the community.
 - Gather listener and viewer statistics for radio and television.
 - Conduct informal surveys with churches, primary care providers, and community organizations.
 - Review page hits on Web sites and social media channels.

5. Evaluate the social marketing strategy.

- Assessment methods include both process and outcome evaluations.
 - Consider partnering with a local university to help with research and data collection.
- Set up mechanisms for data collection early on so you can benchmark and evaluate progress at pre-determined intervals.
- Analyze the data collected against your original goals and objectives. This will uncover the methods that worked well and some that may need to be revised.
- Assess how beliefs and actions of the audience changed.
 - Use formal focus groups.
 - Conduct in-depth interviews.
 - Use surveys.
 - Hold informal discussion group meetings if funds are limited.
 - If you are directing people to a certain action, such as visiting a program or Web site or calling a hotline, verify whether there were increases in activity (visits, page hits, or call volume).

6. Use feedback to refine your plan.

- Analyze whether your efforts influenced a behavior change, and to what extent.
- Remember, this is an iterative process; always be open to revisions and changes as you learn more from your data collection and the audience's reactions.

References

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