

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Whom should the Health Educator Supervisor engage, and to what end? These questions are answered in part by the supervisor's position description. The supervisor's charge includes educating the public about the need for sex education and access to family planning services, as well as developing strategic relationships and agreements to serve initiative goals.

Here's a brief look at each of the Health Educator Supervisor's relevant responsibilities.

- 1** **Serve as principle representative in priority communities to provide community and public education on comprehensive sexuality education and awareness of family planning services.** Adults in communities that have high rates of teen pregnancy and STDs/HIV can better support their youth if they understand the need for sex education and access to family planning services.
- 2** **Identify venues for delivery of evidence-based programming, including reviewing all components of the evidence-based program and securing their commitment to implement the program with fidelity.** EBPs can be delivered effectively only if the administrators and key staff of the host venue understand and agree to the EBP's implementation requirements.
- 3** **Ensure access to comprehensive reproductive health care services, family planning services, and other essential support services for teens.** Strategic community engagement is essential to identifying and breaking down barriers to these services. By involving the right community members – including teens themselves – supervisors will understand the local issues better and enlist key partners in improving access.
- 4** **Establish relationships with other community health and human service providers and develop referral mechanisms.** CAPP and PREP project staff connect program participants to the services and opportunities they need to improve their health and well-being. The Health Educator Supervisor is responsible for developing the relationships and referral mechanisms that will strengthen this process.

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COMMUNITY READINESS

If the community isn't ready efforts for an adolescent sexual health initiative, your efforts could be undermined. It may not be easy to increase sex education and access to family planning if the issue has no base of support or community champions. Assessing readiness for change is critical: if a community is not ready to address an issue (such as teen pregnancy), or to support a specific intervention (such as an EBP), efforts to create change are not likely to be effective.

The Community Readiness Model (CRM) is a tool for measuring a community's readiness for change. Once we understand how ready a community is to address a particular issue, we can identify strategies that will shift the community along a continuum from no awareness toward commitment to positive action. ACT for Youth recommends that providers use the Community Readiness Model as a tool for strategic community work.

The CRM is discussed in the online *Health Educator Supervisor Training*.

The original tool was developed by the Tri-Ethnic Center at Colorado State University. Working with one of the original developers, ACT for Youth has designed an adaptation of the CRM specifically for CAPP and PREP. Find information, tools, and other resources to help you through the process on the ACT for Youth site: http://www.actforyouth.net/sexual_health/community/capp/readiness.cfm

Your TA/Evaluation Support Team member can guide you through this process.

ENGAGING COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Any initiative to decrease adolescent pregnancy, STD, and HIV rates needs community partners to succeed. Here we offer ideas for engaging new partners – community stakeholders who may not traditionally be invited to play a role in prevention efforts.

BE STRATEGIC

A community council or coalition approach may or may not be effective, depending on your local situation. Through the community readiness process, you may identify the need to engage a particular constituency to build support for your efforts.

- How are you defining "community"?
- What exactly is the issue you want to address?
- What is that community's level or readiness with respect to your issue? (See the Community Readiness process discussed on the previous page.)
- What strategies are likely to work given your community's readiness level?
- Whom do you want to engage? Be specific.
- Why would they engage? What's in it for them?
- Where will you find them?
- How will you approach them? And who is your best messenger? You might designate the initial outreach or contact to someone with a personal connection to the community stakeholder you want to engage. Remember – relationships are key!
- What is your core message? Think "elevator speech."
- What will you ask of them? Be flexible! Ideally, participation will not be limited to attending meetings. Offer a range of options for getting involved.

ENGAGING FAITH COMMUNITIES IN TEEN PREGNANCY, STD/HIV PREVENTION EFFORTS

If you are trying to connect with *faith communities*, *business*, or *parents*, you will find suggestions for reaching out to each of these groups on the ACT for Youth website. Note that these documents were not created specifically for CAPP and PREP but may have ideas you can use. Find them here: http://www.actforyouth.net/sexual_health/community/partners.cfm

WHY CONNECT WITH FAITH COMMUNITIES?

Faith communities may share your vision and goals. Many religious communities are committed to making the world a better place for children, developing youth leadership, and making a difference at the local level. Many have a social justice focus that is expressed through service in local communities. Some faith-based organizations will be able to work with you directly on teen pregnancy prevention; others will be able to join your efforts to prepare youth for adulthood.

It's good to have Faith on your side. When you are advocating for community change, it's good to have the clout and strong community ties that many faith communities bring to the table.

Faith communities are connected to youth. Many religious organizations sponsor youth groups, and frequently these groups are active or interested in social change and community service. Some congregations offer safe spaces for LGBTQ youth or runaway homeless youth. Congregations like these have a wealth of experience and connections to bring to your initiative. Some are already offering positive sex education programs to youth in their congregations.

TALKING POINTS FOR ENGAGING FAITH COMMUNITIES

Describe Who You Are Succinctly

“[Our initiative] brings people together to help youth stay healthy, avoid pregnancy, and achieve their goals. We want our community to be a place where young people have the support they need to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives. We [have/are creating] a plan to reduce our community’s high adolescent pregnancy rates by expanding access to proven education programs, health services, and youth development opportunities.”

What's in it for the Faith Community?

Making a difference: “In our community, adolescent pregnancy rates are higher than the state average. We believe we can help young people change those statistics. By becoming involved, you can help us create the opportunities and resources that youth in our community need and deserve.”

Community outreach: “Participation in our effort may help your faith community develop new community connections.”

Your services: You may find that religious organizations are interested in a variety of education services that you can provide.

- **Clergy and lay leader professional development:** Religious leaders help members of their congregations cope with all kinds of personal matters, but they are not necessarily experts in sexual health services and counseling. They may be interested in an in-service on teen sex and sexuality in your community, available services, and counseling techniques.

- **Parent education:** You may be able to offer speakers for adult education; for example, “How to Talk to Your Kids about Sex,” or “How to Be an Askable Parent.” Let your contact know the range of talks you can offer.
- **Youth education:** “We offer an evidence-based sexual health education program that we would be happy to provide to your youth group.”

IDENTIFY A RANGE OF MEANINGFUL ROLES

Clergy and lay leaders have many demands on their time. Provide a range of ways to get involved, from very light involvement to becoming a central member of your community council. Even the smallest role, however, should be meaningful.

- **Less intensive roles:** Provide space for meetings or events, invite you to write an article for their newsletter; invite you to speak to the congregation or religious coalition.
- **More intensive:** Speak at an initiative event; organize opportunities for you to provide education to lay leaders, parents, or youth; help you plan a clergy event.
- **Most intensive:** Serve on your advisory council, advocate for policy change, solicit other clergy/lay leaders to join your effort.

RESOURCES

For more on **community approaches to adolescent sexual health**, visit ACT for Youth:
http://www.actforyouth.net/sexual_health/community/

TIPS FOR INCLUDING FAITH COMMUNITIES

1. **Knowing your congregation is key!** A member of the congregation will be the most effective ambassador to the clergy or youth minister.
2. **Establish common ground.** You may find that you are best able to collaborate on goals related to healthy youth development, such as giving young people the tools to make healthy decisions, build positive relationships, and develop education and career goals – all of which have a real impact on teen pregnancy and sexual health.
3. **Check the calendar.** Check an interfaith calendar before scheduling meetings and events at which you hope to have participation from members of faith communities.
4. **Think outside the church.** Welcome and include all faith communities to your initiative—not just majority denominations.
5. **Include lay leaders.** Don’t focus strictly on the clergy. Lay leaders, religious educators, and youth group leaders may be equally valuable and may have more time to offer.