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Recruitment and Retention of Teens for Pregnancy Prevention Programs: A Social Marketing Approach

Social marketing is an important tool for recruitment and retention of teens. Social marketing uses the principals and techniques from commercial marketing to promote the adoption of a behavior that will improve health or well-being of a target audience or society as a whole.¹ It includes strategies that can be used to promote your teen pregnancy prevention program and services.

When thinking about recruitment and retention, it is critical to put yourself in the position of the individuals your program is trying to reach in order to:

- Understand what else is competing for your audience's time and attention;
- Target your messaging; and
- Be able to communicate effectively with youth and their parents and/or guardians.

To consider your target population's perspective, begin by identifying the barriers, benefits, and competition that exist for your target population (your audience) in relation to your programs and services.

Barriers are reasons your audience cannot or does not want to participate in your project, remain in your program, or use your services. Some examples of barriers may include:

- Family responsibilities (e.g., have to care for younger siblings, have to work to contribute to family income, etc.);
- Cultural norms that do not support participation in programs that discuss pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- Transportation;
- Lack of parental support; and
- Lack of peer acceptance.

Benefits are reasons your audience might be interested or motivated to participate in your program. Some examples of benefits may include:

- Dedicated time with peers;
- A variety of fun activities;
- Improved communication and negotiation skills;

¹ *Social Marketing: Influencing Behaviors for Good*, Philip Kotler and Nancy R. Lee (SAGE 2008).

- Increased knowledge of sexual health, contraceptives, condom use, relationships, and dating violence; and
- Supportive community.

Competition is the activities your audience prefers, activities or groups that support “undesirable” behaviors, or other activities occurring at the same time as your program. Some examples of competition include:

- Hanging out with friends in an unstructured environment;
- Peer groups who are having sex, drinking alcohol, and using other substances;
- Extra-curricular activities; and
- Organizations that may stigmatize comprehensive sex education efforts.

TO DO: Analyze your audience and the competition.

- Make a list of potential **barriers** to participating in or staying engaged in your program.
- What are the key **benefits** your audience will be motivated by?
- What are the major competing alternative **activities or behaviors**?
- What **benefits** does your audience associate with these activities/behaviors?
- What **costs** does your audience associate with these activities/behaviors?
- What else **influences** your audience?

These same strategies can be employed to analyze the barriers, benefits, and competition that your audience may have in relation to adopting the desired behaviors you are promoting through your programs.

Strategic Marketing Mix (The 4Ps)

Developed by Neil Borden in the 1950s, the strategic marketing mix describes the key elements of a marketing campaign. These elements--**product**, **price** (benefits and cost), **place**, and **promotion**--are the marketing tools that can be used in your teen pregnancy prevention program recruitment and retention strategy.

PRODUCT: Design the Product Platform

Below are questions to consider when developing this component of the recruitment and retention strategy.

1. What is the **core product** (the major perceived benefit) your target audience wants from attending your program that you will highlight?
2. What is the **actual product** (the desired behavior or program)?
3. Are there any **additional services** that will be included in recruitment efforts?
4. Are there any improvements that need to be made to **existing services**?

PRICE: Benefits and Costs

Price is the cost the audience associates with participating in your program, including both tangible and intangible costs. The goal is to reduce costs and increase benefits for the audience.

Incentives for youth may differ from incentives for parents/guardians. For example, youth may value tangible incentives such as program gear, food, movie tickets, and gift cards. Whereas, parents may be attracted to the life skills aspects of the program such as financial literacy, and education and career success. Therefore, remember your audience when offering incentives.

Provide or increase incentives for attending and/or completing the program. Check with your project officer about the possibility of purchasing incentives with project funds.

Decrease tangible costs for the attending program (e.g., transportation – offer bus passes; HIV/STI testing – provide free testing; etc.)

Increase intangible benefits for attending the program (e.g., making new friends, safe space, breaking from household responsibilities, access to non-judgmental adults, honest answers, etc.).

Decrease intangible costs for the program (e.g., reduce length and/or stagger frequency of program activities, etc.) while maintaining fidelity to core components.

Below are questions to consider when developing the price component of the recruitment and retention strategy.

1. If you are including other services in your recruitment and retention strategy, what, if anything, will the audience have to **pay** for them?
2. Will there be **tangible or other incentives** to participate in the program?
3. Will there be **tangible or other costs** you will highlight?

PLACE: Make Access Convenient

Place is where and when your audience will receive the programs and services that you are marketing. Look for ways to make the locations closer to your audience and more appealing, to extend hours, and to be present at the point that audience members are making decisions.

Below are questions to consider when developing this component of the recruitment and retention strategy.

1. **Where** and **when** will you encourage and support your audience to attend your program?
2. **Where** and **when** will your audience receive any additional services?

PROMOTION: What Will You Say, Who Will Say It, How, and Where?

Below are questions to consider when developing this component of the recruitment and retention strategy.

1. **Messages:** What **key messages** do you want your recruitment strategy to communicate to your audience?
2. **Messengers:** **Who will deliver** the messages and/or be associated with the program?
3. **Creative strategy:** Summarize, describe, or highlight **program elements**, such as logo, taglines, visuals, colors, etc.
4. **Communication channels:** What **communication channels** (e.g., print media, social media, websites, posters, email, texts, radio, posters, etc.) and promotional items will you use?

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