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Recruiting CDSMP Participants: The Basics

Here, you'll find the key elements for successfully developing, implementing, and maintaining an effective recruitment and marketing effort for a chronic disease self-management program (CDSMP).

■ Think Strategically

- Develop a plan that sets out measurable objectives over a period of time for your recruitment and marketing efforts, as well as a clear sense of audience, message and tactics (see below). This will enable you to set interim benchmarks and chart your progress over time.
- Based on this plan, set aside an appropriate budget. This work takes time and resources and is critical to the ultimate success of your program. If no one comes, all of the rest of your good work putting on CDSMP workshops will go for naught.

■ What's Your People Power?

- People matter. While this work may not require a full time employee, someone will need to spend time to oversee this effort. This requires some knowledge or expertise. Who on your staff has marketing experience or skills? Are there volunteers who can help?
- Create a marketing advisory committee to help strengthen the knowledge and connections you need to be successful.

■ Think Audience

- Once you are clear about your plan, think about the people your community sites are trying to recruit into their programs. Who are they? Where do they live? What do they care about? Where do they congregate? Where do they get their information? Use this knowledge to think about communications tactics that will work.

■ Get Your Message Straight

Based on our research, these messages resonate best with potential CDSMP participants:

- ***Feel better.*** CDSMP can increase your energy and help you get relief from pain, fatigue, and anxiety.
- ***Take control of your life.*** CDSMP helps you do the things you want to do each day.

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- **Get connected.** CDSMPs give you the opportunity to learn from others who have similar health issues.

Remember certain words are better than others: Use “ongoing health condition” rather than “chronic disease.” Use “workshops” instead of “classes.”

■ Get Your Message Out

- Don't wait. Start getting the word out at least eight weeks in advance of the first workshops being run in your area or region.
- At the beginning, face-to-face presentations to groups in your target audience (at senior centers, senior housing, churches/synagogues/mosques or at other sites) can help to preview the program and attract “the most interested.”
- Direct mail letters signed by trusted community or health care leaders can be a cost- and time-effective way to generate new people interested in the program. Expect 5-10% of people who receive this kind of a letter to express interest in the CDSMP.
- Once sites have run the program, seek out participant “champions” who can tell their peers about the program and bring new people in.
- Regular announcements in event listings in local papers are often helpful.
- Depending on your audience and its comfort with technology, e-mails to qualified lists can be effective, as well.

■ Build Your Infrastructure

- Relationships with key organizations in your area are critical to creating robust communications channels. Reach out early to government, nonprofit, religious and other leaders who can enable you to reach their constituents or members.
- Create a database and enter each person's name and contact information who calls or looks for information about a workshop. Keep building this list and keep sending messages to that list, either by e-mail, phone, or mail. These are your best prospects.
- Develop a list of key media outlets in your area—TV, radio, and newspapers—particularly those that have a significant readership/viewership that matches your target audience.

■ Use Our Materials

- The Center for Healthy Aging has developed a whole range of professionally designed materials including brochures, posters, PowerPoint presentations, templated event listings, press releases, and other resources. These can save you time and effort and ensure that your messages are strong.

■ Contact Us

For additional information, please contact the Center for Healthy Aging at ebhpprograms@ncoa.org. Most marketing materials are posted in the grantee section of the Center's site www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/chronic-disease. If you do not already have a password, please register so that we can grant you access to these resources.