Making the Business Case

Tips and tools for engaging local businesses in improving the health of the community
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Background

When working to improve the health of the community, it is critical to build a diverse team of partners to create a community-owned process. Key stakeholders will bring perspectives and resources that will make your team’s efforts more effective. One important partner to engage is the business community. However, many health-focused collaboratives struggle with how to successfully bring businesses to the table as full partners. Perhaps the language and framework of those more frequently involved in community prevention work does not translate well to those of businesses and vice versa.

The resources in this document are designed to provide guidance and tools to assist your team in engaging local businesses in the important work of community health improvement. Included are:

- A few key tips for working effectively with businesses
- A more detailed guide to help you better understand how to partner with businesses
- Materials to give businesses to help them understand the benefits of community prevention efforts
- Links to additional related resources

A Few Key Tips

While the resources below provide more detailed guidance on working with businesses to improve health in your community, a few key themes emerge:

1. **Get to know your business community.**
   While there is some excellent advice in the materials below on things to learn about local businesses before approaching them, it may be difficult to know where to start. Local partners who may be able to help are:
   - United Way, who may be part of your community health improvement efforts and has an ongoing relationship with local businesses related to contributing to improving the community.
   - Chamber of Commerce or Business Council, who will, at minimum, have contact information and data about the business community and may know a champion for health issues.
   - University of Wisconsin Extension Office, who may have worked with various businesses in the community and have helpful background information.

2. **Function like a business.**
   - Your meetings have an agenda, ground rules, and timely minutes, are run efficiently and start and end on time.
   - Progress reports are reviewed regularly so that measurable achievements can be seen and return on investment can be demonstrated.
   - Your work is based on quality measures such as evidence-informed practice or accreditation standards.
3. Make a specific ask.
   Once you know more about each business, it may be easier to see what their role could be in your effort.
   • Don’t just ask them to “be involved.” Come with specific roles or tasks you can ask them to do.
   • This can be an open discussion or negotiation, but come with specific options.

For more detailed guidance on working collaboratively with your local businesses, see:

   • The Business Interest in a Community’s Health below
   • Community Health Partnerships: Tools and Information for Development and Support (National Business Coalition on Health)

Materials in this Document

How to Partner with Businesses
   • The Business Interest in a Community’s Health
     Practical tips on engaging the business community; based on research by The Washington Business Group on Health prepared for the Kellogg Foundation.

Materials to Provide to Businesses
   • The Benefits of Community Prevention
     This brief document provides key talking points for why investing in prevention makes sense. (Adapted from The Prevention Institute.)
   • Economic Benefits of Preventing Disease
     This one-page handout from the National Prevention Strategy outlines evidence for how:
     • Prevention lowers health care costs; and
     • Prevention increases productivity

Additional Related Resources

There are several tools available at www.wicommunityhealth.org (see Resources by Stage, Table of Resources) that will provide you some additional insight and assistance as you work on collaborating with your local businesses:
   • “Collaborate” Checklist: The checklist on “Collaborate with Stakeholders and Community Members” in the Wisconsin Guidebook on Improving the Health of Local Communities provides general guidance about how to engage key stakeholders, including steps to fully involve them in the leadership of your effort.
   • Sharing Leadership: A Guide to Stakeholder Engagement: This guide includes a section on “More specific guidance on engaging the business community,” including links to several additional national tools.
   • A Healthy Place to Live, Learn, Work and Play: Understanding Community Health Improvement Processes: This PowerPoint presentation, along with related handouts, is designed to bring newly recruited stakeholders up to speed on the community health improvement process. This will help to create a common knowledge base.
   • Improving the Health of Local Communities: The Wisconsin Way: This short, user-friendly model provides an excellent overview of what makes a community healthy and techniques for how a community can become healthier.

This resource was developed with funding from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health from the Wisconsin Partnership Program. The resource is a result of a collaboration between the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards, the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, and numerous additional partners. For more information, please go to www.wicommunityhealth.org or www.walhdab.org.
THE BUSINESS INTEREST IN A COMMUNITY’S HEALTH

From the Washington Business Group on Health

The health of a community impacts the economic health of its businesses; corporations are able to play a unique role in the development of a community’s health and continued vitality. This interdependence sets the stage and context for business-community collaborations to improve a community’s health. Based on the specific needs of the potential participants in and recipients of a community health initiative, there is a wide range of opportunities for collaboration. The current healthcare trends of consumerism and availability of information and services on the Internet also point to new opportunities, partnerships and venues for effective community initiatives.

To engage business in improving a community’s health, it is vital for community organizations to understand the perspective of employers, the business culture, and the values that tie business to their local communities. Effective business involvement requires a unique approach to community health project management, implementation and evaluation. Large companies want community improvement initiatives with a long-term focus, or goal, and the broadest impact possible. They also will demand concrete, immediate steps.

Objective measures of a project’s effectiveness must include measures of program effectiveness (“what works”) and measures of cost-effectiveness to reflect the project’s value (i.e., the returns outweigh the investments).

Tips for Engaging the Business Community

Initiating a Community Project

☐ **First Do Your Homework**
Develop a profile of each company in your community that you may approach. Include key information such as the company’s line(s) of business, the age/sex distribution of its workers, what percent of its overall employee population works at the location within your community, the proportion of your community employed by this company, and so on. This will help in determining whether to approach a company, for what project, and whether to contact the local level or the corporate headquarters.

☐ **Check for a Track Record of Collaborations with Community Organizations**
Often businesses have established partnerships and collaborations with local colleges and universities, health plans, or consumer health organizations, among others. These will reflect some of the company’s values and interests, and may be logical starting points to build new collaborative activities.

☐ **Identify and Contact Local Business Coalitions and Groups That Focus on Health and Workforce Productivity Issues**
Across the United States, there are numerous geographically based business coalitions and business groups on health that have local businesses and corporations with a local presence in their membership. These organizations are likely to already know many of the health concerns that their individual members currently face. The local business members often have a working relationship with these organizations and have established a level of trust and understanding.
Discover What a Business May Be Doing on Its Own
Most large corporations are engaged in workplace health and work-life programs that they either design themselves or purchase from other organizations. Many of these programs could be used as a starting point for collaborative work with the larger community.

Select Potential Companies and Find a Contact Within Each
Don’t go for the CEO as your contact unless you have connections (or inside information about that person’s familial experiences with health care!). Learn how the company’s management functions, and who is most likely to have responsibility for or interest in a community health improvement project. Most of the contacts will likely be through the corporate affairs department, corporate or regional medical directors or the human resources and benefits departments.

Ask, Ask, Ask
To an extent, you will be creating the project as you go. In our experience, when the employer didn’t have ready suggestions or protocols to share with us, they were quick to say, “tell them [community organizations] to just ask us.” If you’ve done a reasonable amount of homework up front, then you’re prepared to “just ask.” This also reflects the flexibility and interest that these participants have in getting a community initiative going. Take advantage of it.

Planning a Successful Initiative

Practice “Smart Scheduling” for Meetings and Conference Calls
Like physicians and clinicians, business folk tend to keep a tightly wound and very full schedule. So meet them where they are. This may mean setting meetings or calls at 7:00 am or 7:00 pm, if that’s when they’re all available. Piggyback a meeting on a conference when appropriate, particularly if the project involves participants from diverse locations who plan to be at the conference anyway.

Collectively Develop a List of Common Needs, Interests, and Concerns
Volunteers need to know that the initiative will meet their needs and interests. You will get more commitment and involvement if the group together identifies their values and common interests.

Collectively Identify the Initiative’s Goals, Participants and Measures of Effectiveness
Large companies want community initiatives with a long-term focus, or goal, and the broadest impact possible. They also will demand concrete, immediate steps. Involve the businesses in determining the project scope and necessary participants. This also will tell you the degree of support and resources that you can expect.

Concrete project activities also require objective, measurable progress. Use the group to establish measures of progress and success in reaching the stated project goals. Throughout the project, this data will provide evidence of the project’s success and effectiveness. This information is critical to the workgroup’s decisions and activities, as well as for attracting and renewing commitment to the project from its participating organizations and funders.

Objective measures of the project’s effectiveness must include measures of program effectiveness (“what works”) and measures of cost-effectiveness to reflect the project’s value (i.e., the returns outweigh the investments).
Accomplishing a Successful Initiative

- Practice Efficient and Effective Project Management: the Do’s and Don’ts
  - Don’t rely on serendipity. Develop, distribute and adhere to an agenda for each group discussion. If the group needs to stop and brainstorm, say so and allow or plan time for that.

  Don’t leave participants in the dark. Early in the project, collect each participant’s contact information and preferred mode of contact, and distribute this to the group. Spend time getting to know each other. Set group process rules that everyone agrees to respect. Draft a project timeline, and schedule key meetings and conference calls well in advance. Determine how participants will be involved: do they all need to be in every meeting and on every call?

  Don’t let the project float away. Regularly review the project’s performance against the identified measures of progress and success, and discuss the results with the group. Re-evaluate the timeline and agree to adjustments as necessary.

  Don’t leave anyone holding the bag. Assign accountabilities for the various project components and timelines. Everyone should have a role. Don’t ever saddle a participant with the lion’s share of the work.

- Recognize and Respect the Business Realities of a Company
  There will be times when the business representative (or other participants) will need to cancel on a call or meeting. Last minute changes and cancellations do not reflect lack of commitment, but the realities of the fast-paced, multitasking culture of many corporations. Likewise, the frequent realities of corporate mergers and divestitures may affect the company’s degree of participation in the short run. Listen and watch for creative ways to keep the project on track anyway.

- Individually and Collectively Protect the Group’s Project From Politics
  If you succeed in engendering group ownership of the initiative, use the group to protect it. First own it, then defend it. Politics outside the group can come from many directions. Use leverage within the group membership to do what it takes to preserve and strengthen the effort.

Washington Business Group on Health, 50 F Street, NW, Suite 600, Washington DC 20001; (202) 628-9320.
THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY PREVENTION

From The Prevention Institute

The Business Case for Prevention

- A healthy community, where people can access healthy foods and safe places to be physically active, is good for business. Businesses spend $73 billion dollars a year on chronic diseases that these kinds of efforts can prevent. Our local businesses are going to save money on healthcare costs, lost work days and medical claims when their workforce is healthier.

- Community prevention helps to build our neighborhood infrastructure and the local economy: bike paths, pedestrian walkways and smart public transit make it easier and faster to shop at local businesses. Local business owners are getting equipment upgrades and publicity for their stores and products. Instead of shipping food in from out-of-state or out of the country, our kids are eating local foods, from local farmers, prepared right here in our city.

- Our local businesses really deserve the extra boost that a healthy community will bring. Workplace wellness programs build a healthier workforce and a better bottom line: for every dollar a workplace spends on wellness programs, medical costs fall by about $3.27. [1]

Prevention Saves Money and Lives

- Many of the leading causes of illness, injury, and death are preventable. Every dollar invested in building healthy communities will reduce the burden and demand on our health care system, and ensure that more people will be healthier for longer periods of their life. We owe it to our families; we owe it to our kids.

- This is the first generation that is likely to have a shorter life span than their parents. We owe it to our children and grandchildren to start investing in building healthy communities now.

- Seven of ten deaths among Americans each year are caused by chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes—diseases that could be prevented.[2] These same chronic diseases account for more than 75% of our nation's health care spending.[3] Community prevention dollars are working right now to alleviate some of these soaring costs—and improving health at the same time. A 5% reduction—just in diabetes and high blood pressure rates—would save our country as much as 24.7 billion dollars a year.[4]

- Community prevention funding is a smart investment that will pay off by building health and preventing people from getting sick in the first place. For every dollar we spend on prevention, we see a five-to-one return on investment in just five years. We simply can't fix our economy without it.

The Public Wants Prevention

- Seventy-three percent of the American people back community prevention.[5] Their support is even stronger for the kinds of efforts community prevention is focused on right now: bringing more fresh fruits and vegetables into our stores, providing healthier lunches for kids, and banning smoking from public places.[6]

Without the commitment and leadership of community members, from PTA's, YMCA's, churches and local chambers of commerce, community prevention couldn't succeed.
Community Prevention is Local

- Chronic diseases related to unhealthy food options, availability and promotion of tobacco products and lack of safe places for physical activity are one of the biggest drains on our economy. Communities across the country know it, and they're rolling up their sleeves and doing just what Americans do best: finding innovative solutions. Our local leaders, churches, businesses and parents know best what works for us here.

- Every time you buckle your child into a car seat, you're practicing this same kind of community prevention: policies help protect our health, and they help shape our expectations. Kids didn't use to be automatically put in car seats—parents couldn't buy them or afford them, cars didn't accommodate them, and our culture didn't support them. We used policy to change that. That's the same kind of shift we want to see—we want children and parents to take for granted that the places they live, work, play, and learn are going to support them in healthy eating and physical activity—not make it harder.

- We're working together with local businesses, faith leaders, community groups and local health departments to figure out the best ways to build health right here.

Adapted from: “Community Prevention Talking Points,” Prevention Institute 221 Oak Street Oakland, CA 94607; 510.444.7738; http://www.preventioninstitute.org/

References

3. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
ECONOMIC BENEFITS
OF PREVENTING DISEASE

From The National Prevention Strategy

Prevention can reduce the significant economic burden of disease in addition to improving the length and quality of people’s lives. Treatment, lost productivity, and health care costs are significant burdens to the economy, families, and businesses. Prevention policies and programs often are cost-effective, reduce health care costs, and improve productivity. The following examples show why prevention is the best buy in health.

Prevention lowers health care costs

- A five percent reduction in the prevalence of hypertension would save $25 billion in 5 years.\(^1\)
- Annual health care costs are $2,000 higher for smokers, $1,400 higher for people who are obese, and $6,600 higher for those who have diabetes than for nonsmokers, people who are not obese, or people do not have diabetes.\(^2\)
- A 1 percent reduction in weight, blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol risk factors would save $83 to $103 annually in medical costs per person.\(^3\)
- Increasing use of preventive services, including tobacco cessation screening, alcohol abuse screening and aspirin use, to 90 percent of the recommended levels could save $3.7 billion annually in medical costs.\(^4\)
- Medical costs are reduced by approximately $3.27 for every dollar spent on workplace wellness programs, according to a recent study.\(^5\)
- Dietary sodium is linked to increased prevalence of hypertension, a primary risk factor for cardiovascular and renal diseases. Cardiovascular disease alone accounts for nearly 20 percent of medical expenditures and 30 percent of Medicare expenditures.\(^6\)
- Reducing average population sodium intake to 2,300 milligrams per day could save $18 billion in health care costs annually.\(^7\)
- Tobacco use accounts for 11 percent of Medicaid costs and nearly 10 percent of Medicare costs.\(^8\)
- Tobacco screening is estimated to result in lifetime savings of $9,800 per person.\(^9\)
- For every HIV infection prevented, an estimated $355,000 is saved in the cost of providing lifetime HIV treatment.\(^10\)
- A proven program that prevents diabetes may save costs within three years.\(^11\) One of every five U.S. health care dollars is spent on caring for people with diagnosed diabetes.\(^12\) People who increased physical activity (2½ hours a week) and had 5 to 7 percent weight loss reduced their risk of developing type 2 diabetes by 58 percent regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender.\(^13\)

Prevention increases productivity

- Indirect costs to employers of employee poor health—lower productivity, higher rates of disability, higher rates of injury, and more workers’ compensation claims—can be two to three times the costs of direct medical expenses.\(^14\)
- Asthma, high blood pressure, smoking, and obesity each reduce annual productivity by between $200 and $440 per person.\(^15\)
- Workers with diabetes average two more work days absent per year than workers without diabetes.\(^16\)
- Absenteeism costs are reduced by approximately $2.73 for every dollar spent on workplace wellness programs, according to a recent study.\(^5\)
- Research from the Milken Institute suggests that a modest reduction in avoidable risk factors could lead to a gain of more than $1 trillion annually in labor supply and efficiency by 2023.\(^17\)

References