

Insights

4 Strategies for Building a Public Health Social Movement

With the proliferation of social media sites, 24-hour news stations and niche hobby/topic websites, getting attention for a cause these days is certainly a challenge. The healthcare sphere is not immune to this. Each month there are multiple topics competing in celebration of their national awareness month. Consumer inboxes are besieged with countless email blasts about well-intended fundraising events or annual donation drives aimed at addressing particular health issues. It simply is getting harder and harder to cut above the clutter and grab the attention and support of the right people to move an initiative forward.

Forget the old marketing tactic of shouting loud and often. Mario Drummonds, MS, LCSW, MBA, the CEO of Strategy Interactions, and a participant in the NICHQ-led Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network to Reduce Infant Mortality ([Infant Mortality CoIIN](#)), shares four strategies for building a public health social movement to increase state and national attention on your healthcare issue.

Strategy 1: Declare and establish a state of emergency

Establishing a state of emergency in your community/city begins to transform the political climate of hopelessness. It forces the community, city and state government and the private and public sectors to answer the question, “what is my role in resolving this crisis?”

Tactics include:

- Develop a narrative or campaign message that quickly defines the problem you are organizing around. It should communicate the negative consequences to various aspects of the community if the movement's issues are not addressed or funded, as well as the positive outcomes if the problem is addressed.
- Transform the message into various forms such as fact sheet, press release, talking points, position papers and public service announcements.
- Organize a press conference where people will notice (e.g., steps of state capitol building or city hall).
- Send press releases to print and electronic media and follow up after the press conference. Ask the media to contact key elected officials, private sector leaders and community

leaders to find out what should be done to address the problem.

Strategy 2: Demystify the health issue

There will be no support for your work unless thousands of consumers, community members, the media, elected officials, and public and private sector leaders fully understand the health issue and why they must join the movement to combat it.

Tactics include:

- Create and distribute fact sheets throughout targeted communities.
- Organize informational meetings open to the public at a variety of local places (e.g., churches, beauty shops, business association meetings, etc.) to lower barriers to entry.
- Develop and send letters to those most impacted by the health issue explaining what they can do to help combat the issue.
- Secure editorial space in local newspaper.
- Hold the mayor and governor accountable by asking the press to interview these officials and obtain their policy responses to the message.
- Utilize the internet, email and blogs to create an online community interested in learning more about your health topic.

Strategy 3: Secure strategic champions

Champions can speed up the movement's attempt to achieve its desired goal by amplifying the movement's message across sectors.

Tactics include:

- Agree to specific tasks for the champion and hold him/her accountable.
- Coordinate champion activities with other tactics in the campaign to build momentum.

Strategy 4: Build an organizational structure

No movement will be built without a solid, flexible and effective campaign organization with staff and volunteers to execute strategies and tactics.

Tactics include:

- Have a tiered organizational structure that includes a leadership council, regional coordinating entities and teams focused on key functions of the campaign, such as policy and legislative action, social marketing, evaluation and data, community mobilization and media affairs.

“Don’t stop until the conversation moves to discussing your health topic,” says Drummond. “That is the only way to build a public health social movement.

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