

KENTUCKY CANCER CONSORTIUM



Consistent,
concise and
constructive
communication
is essential for
a cohesive
partnership.



Strengthening Partnerships Through Consistent, Concise and Constructive COMMUNICATION



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INTRODUCTION

The Kentucky Cancer Consortium (KCC) is a statewide partnership of 27 organizations committed to working together to reduce cancer in Kentucky. Funded and guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the KCC provides a framework in which organizations and individuals can unite as one powerful force through implementation of the Kentucky Cancer Action Plan. Communication is an integral part of mobilizing partners as one powerful force to identify and solve cancer control health problems.

METHODS

How Communication Became Central:

The KCC was organizationally restructured in 2006. At the first subsequent Steering Committee retreat, the need for consistent, concise and constructive communication emerged as a theme. Members discussed two important questions:

- What does KCC involvement bring to individuals and organizations?
- How can program staff improve communication?

Following the retreat, the challenges of optimal communication were discussed further through one-on-one meetings, phone conversations, and e-mails. To overcome these challenges, we were

guided by successes within Kentucky, model programs in other states, and technical support provided by CDC program consultants. From fall 2006 until fall 2007, KCC program staff worked to implement the following strategies to address communication challenges.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Lack of trust among partner organizations

Strategies:

- Made one-on-one visits at least once a year to key stakeholders on their own “turf.”
- Spoke honestly and candidly.
- Proactively connected people.
- Reframed negative remarks about partner organizations.

Unresolved issues from previous activities and decisions; discussing only the “easy” topics openly

Strategies:

- Addressed conflicts head on. Though uncomfortable initially, this was worth the effort and built trust for the future.
- Helped partners recognize that while we/they could not change what happened in the past, we/they could improve communication within future partnerships.

Speaking more than listening

Strategies:

- Actively listened to partners. Synthesized

their thoughts and repeated them for clarification. Kept our focus on the partners' input.

- Admitted it when we did not know the answer, and then found it!

Focusing on the weaknesses rather than the strengths of individual organizations.

Strategies:

- Highlighted the strengths of individual organizations.
- Publicly noted the positives that each partner brings to the table.

Intermittent and/or inconsistent communication

Strategies:

- Developed a communication plan to guide communication efforts.
- Developed key messages to promote consistency.
- Created a communication committee to improve communication through well-facilitated meetings, concise and informative e-mails, up-to-date website, bi-monthly newsletter, and semi-annual summits of regional and state partners.

Not involving the larger group in decision-making

Strategies:

- Conducted electronic surveys to determine what partners needed/wanted from KCC staff.
- Used survey results to guide decisions at subsequent meetings.

Lack of follow-through on commitments

Strategies:

- Did not commit to more than could be accomplished in a timely manner.
- Were clear about priorities and stayed

focused on them.

- Kept a "future projects" file for items that were not current priorities, and conveyed timeline to partners.

Confusion about roles and responsibilities

Strategies:

- Clearly defined in writing the roles and expectations of staff, committees, work groups, and partners.
- Made this information widely accessible through our website and publications.
- Discussed roles and expectations during one-on-one meetings.

Hesitancy to take on leadership roles

Strategies:

- Communicated clearly about leaders' roles and responsibilities.
- Strove to pair individuals with leadership positions that were a good fit.
- Thanked leaders early and often. Wrote notes of appreciation.
- Made KCC staff readily available to offer technical support and serve as a confidential sounding board.

Sharing credit for group accomplishments

Strategies:

- Facilitated open, candid discussions about what the KCC logo represents and use of partners' individual logos.
- Sought consensus whenever possible regarding logo use.

Lengthy meetings that focused more on presentations than decision-making

Strategies:

- Didn't overload the agenda with too much content. Provided updates and reports by e-mail whenever possible.
- Prioritized one or two key items that

required decision-making.

- Worked with partnership leaders to plan content.
- Sent meeting reminders and agendas at least a week in advance.
- Adhered to meeting time frame.
- Selected a neutral location.
- Encouraged group discussion over lecturing.
- Tactfully cut off people who were dominating the meeting (difficult but necessary). Suggested we “hear from someone we haven’t heard from yet.”
- Took note of body language and addressed it appropriately by calling for a break, moving on to next subject, asking specific people for their input, or airing tensions openly.

RESULTS

- KCC has expanded to include 27 active organizations.
- The Steering Committee averages more than 70% attendance at meetings.
- KCC staff receive more than 65% response to e-mail requests and electronic surveys.
- More than 80% of Steering Committee organizations are participating in other KCC committees.
- KCC staff continually work to maintain and enhance effective communication.

CONCLUSIONS

Concise, consistent and constructive communication is an essential part of building partnerships. Beneficial training for leaders of comprehensive cancer control groups and other coalitions should include meeting facilitation, conflict resolution, active listening, and effective writing.

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