PREVENTION COLLABORATION IN ACTION

Engaging the Right Partners

Tips for Successful Recruitment

The elements of successful recruitment aren't complex, but they do take time and resilience. Engaging a potential partner requires careful research, relationship building, and a strategic pitch. But even with careful preparation, there will be times when your efforts don't pan out—at least not initially.

This tool presents some tried-and-true tips from seasoned prevention practitioners on "getting to yes" when recruiting potential prevention partners.

- **Take time to understand the *culture and values* of your potential partner.** Most organizations rely on an accepted set of norms that dictate when staff work (e.g., strictly 9 to 5, or also on nights and weekends), how decisions are made (e.g., consultative, consensus, or directive), how success is defined (e.g., getting things done vs how things get done), and preferred communication styles (e.g., email or face-to-face). Understanding these norms, as well as any words or phrases that are specific to the sector to which you're reaching out, will not only help you shape an effective pitch, but also lay a solid foundation for your continued work together.

- **Take time to establish a relationship**. If you or your coalition's work are not well known to the potential partner, focus on building a relationship and level of trust before moving in for the "ask". Take time to describe areas of work that align with their priorities. Explore any pre-conceived ideas they may have about your organization and take time to correct any misperceptions.

- **Time your recruitment efforts carefully.** There are both good and less-good times to engage in recruitment efforts—depending on the sector you're trying to engage. Your primary goal is to reach out at a time when your potential partner is *most likely* to be receptive: when they are the least busy and most open to collaboration. For example, early August is often a good time to engage school administrators—when they are well rested but not yet inundated with other school responsibilities.

- **Lean on the expertise of "recruitment pros."** Some people are simply more comfortable than others reaching out and connecting with new people. Identify the members of your team who are good at networking, comfortable asking, and have the "woo" gene—and then put them to work! When possible, enlist the help of coalition members who have established relationships with the potential partner to make the initial introduction.

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- **Prioritize your recruitment efforts.** If you are short on time, begin by recruiting those partners whose involvement is most important to your prevention efforts, including those partners who represent and/or can help you reach your community's vulnerable and underserved populations.

- **Be flexible.** Instead of walking away when someone says “no,” ask and genuinely listen to find out why. Explore other ways to potentially work together. For example, a busy agency director may not be interested in chairing a committee but might be willing to serve as a cultural liaison. Remember, there are different levels of collaboration. By adjusting your expectations (and meeting your partner half-way) you are keeping the door open to more involvement over time.

Remember: Every “*no*” leads you closer to a “*yes*”! Don’t let a “no” be the final time you interact. Find out if there are other ways to continue to engage—with no strings attached. For example, ask if you can add the individual to your newsletter mailing list. See if you can call in a month (or six months). Take the opportunity to continue learning about the individual’s organization and their priorities. Listen for what their interests or concerns may be. Change can be scary—or at least uncomfortable—for many. People need time to get used to new ideas and/or ways of doing things.