

Finding and Involving Local Partners to Boost Success

Forming and cultivating partnerships among a variety of local and State audiences increases the sustainability of each children's mental health initiative. In fact, one of the strategies of National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is to involve potential partners in the work and successes of your program.

Remember that the name of the game is "partnership." Look for partners that have something to gain from an alliance with your program, as well as the ability to enhance your message. While the goal of partnership formation is the sustainability of your program, not every partnership will or should generate direct financial support. Nor should you approach only those partners who can provide financial support. Community recognition, public image, the opportunity to work with you and your other partners, and the idea of contributing to the issue of children's mental health can all be powerful incentives for a like-minded partner.

This simple, systematic approach to partnership-building should yield results:

1. **Determine Your Needs.** Identify what you want from a partnership. It can be as simple as access to a new mailing list for potential invitees. In a broader sense, Awareness Day partnerships can add credibility to your message and attract previously hard-to-reach audiences. Do not be afraid to think big, yet start small.
2. **Make a List of Possible Partners.** Brainstorm potential partners that can help you reach your goals. Likely prospects include youth, families, schools, governmental organizations, community and neighborhood associations, corporations and corporate foundations, community centers, and churches, synagogues, and other faith-based organizations.
3. **Choose Likely Candidates.** Concentrate your efforts on potential partners who are most likely to say "yes." Consider:
 - **Connections.** If you have a board member or other strong contact at a company or organization, see if that person would be willing to introduce your program to the group's decisionmakers.
 - **History.** Has the group been involved with children's or mental health needs or given resources in the past?
 - **Ownership.** Your best corporate prospects are companies with local ownership, local franchises, or national organizations where charitable and/or media decisions are made at local branches or outlets.
 - **Reciprocity.** Determine how the organization can benefit from working with your program. What can you offer the partner in return for their support?
4. **Identify Contacts.** Every organization, whether a school, a business, or a city, county, or State government, has its own hierarchy of decisionmakers. Take the time to locate someone who can provide an introduction to the most appropriate contact within the organization. If that is not possible, these tips will help you prepare a more compelling presentation:
 - **Find Out Who Calls the Shots.** If you are looking for a governmental partnership, find out which entities, such as legislative committees or

subcommittees, focus on children's or mental health needs; then find out who sits on those committees or subcommittees. If you are approaching a specific school, you can approach the school's principal; if you are approaching an entire district, contact members of the board of education. If you are hoping to form a corporate partnership, contact the company's corporate contributions, community relations, or community investment departments. You can usually find this information on corporate Web sites or by calling the company and asking for the name, title, and address of the person or group in charge of community relations.

- Learn as Much as You Can About the Organization. Find out what other partnerships or contributions the organization has, whether it has experience with children's or mental health needs, and what it might hope to gain from an alliance with you.
 - Choose Organizations With Similar Missions To Reach Specific Audiences. If your program serves a sizable African American, Hispanic, Tribal, Hmong, or any other ethnic constituency, develop partnerships with organizations in those communities.
5. **Make Your Pitch.** Nothing beats a personal relationship. If you already have an "in" with your target partners, use it. Ask your contact to introduce you to the decisionmakers you need to reach. Your goal is to arrange a face-to-face meeting, where you can state your case and get their support. On the other hand, if you do not have a connection, you should make your first contact in writing-not by telephone or e-mail. Include the following:
- A brief statement on the status of children's mental health in your community, the goals of your Awareness Day event, and what it can mean to that organization
 - How the partner will benefit-specifically, what you will provide in terms of recognition, linkages, or other items of value to the potential partner
 - Specific information about your local program
 - Options for how the partner can help, for example, by giving you a grant to sustain your program's annual operating expenses, featuring your program's success stories in a newsletter, or contacting media on your behalf to request public service announcements
 - General information about your program, including your nonprofit status
 - Contact information for you and your program
 - When you will call to follow up
6. **Follow Up.** Give your pitch a week to arrive, and then make the follow-up phone call. Be prepared to send your pitch again, possibly to a different person. Ask for a meeting where you can make your pitch face-to-face. When you meet with the prospective partner:
- Be clear about what you want the partner to do for you;
 - Come prepared with good information on costs and other things the prospective partner might want to know, including facts about Awareness Day itself;
 - Be flexible: Have alternative ideas available for the prospective partner to consider; and

- Listen to what the prospective partner wants in return. Decide how your program can create a win-win situation for all.
- 7. Come to an Agreement, and Put It in Writing. Work with the partner to specify exactly what you can expect from each other and when.
- 8. Maintain the Relationship. Like any relationship, the partnership needs attention in order to grow. Maintain two-way communications with your partners and keep them posted on news from your program and your Awareness Day plans-even if it is a controversial issue or unflattering portrayal of your program (it is better for them to hear it from you than from the media). In addition, be sure to send thank-you notes to program partners, and make sure they receive evaluation data. Working together will likely increase the partner's interest in your program and increase its commitment to it.

Reference:

http://www.samhsa.gov/children/pnb_involving.asp