Toolkit and Media Campaign Help Communities Promote Physical Activity

Designing and printing a community marketing/communications tool kit to promote physical activity

SUMMARY

From May 2001 through September 2004, the public relations firm Porter Novelli developed a toolkit, *Promoting Active Living Communities: A Guide to Marketing and Communication*, for community organizing groups, elected and appointed officials and others to use to promote physical activity and environments favorable to physical activity.

Key Results

Porter Novelli accomplished the following under the grant:

- Published 2,000 copies of *Promoting Active Living Communities: A Guide to Marketing and Communication*. The toolkit includes:
  - A step-by-step approach to planning marketing and communication programs.
  - How to motivate, influence and persuade an audience.
  - Examples from other communication programs.
  - Developing the message and how to be strategic about framing and promoting it with the media.
  - Evaluating communication efforts.
  - Resources for more information and for involving partners.

- Developed a media campaign and disseminated a press release and audio news release in August 2004 to announce the availability of an online calculator of the cost of physical inactivity. The national media campaign resulted in:
  - Several articles in trade publications, including *Biotech Week* and *Obesity, Fitness & Wellness Week*. 
— Reaching 25 million radio listeners in August 2004 through the audio news release.

- Prepared a fact sheet on the background of the calculator and a user guide, both available online.

**Funding**

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provided two grants from May 2001 to September 2004 totaling $218,507 for the toolkit.

**THE PROBLEM**

Two-thirds of American are overweight, up from half 20 years ago, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Individuals and communities interested in promoting physical activity to help address this problem have no single source for information on how to implement this type of programming at the community level. Although several guides discuss what needs to happen within communities to promote physical activity, there is no comprehensive implementation or how-to manual available for communities that wish to engage their residents in the process of changing the social climate around physical activity.

**CONTEXT**

Promoting healthy communities and lifestyles is an RWJF goal area. One of RWJF’s strategies to meet this goal has been to find ways to increase physical activity through community design and redesign and to build a stronger knowledge base from which to promote active living. RWJF has four active living programs:

- **Active Living Research Program** stimulates and supports research to identify environmental factors and policies that influence physical activity (for more information see Program Results Report). Findings are expected to inform environmental and policy changes that will promote active living among Americans.

- **Active Living by Design Program** incorporates activity-promoting goals and processes into ongoing community planning efforts and supports the development and testing of local community active living projects, with special efforts to reach low-income Americans (for more information see Program Results Report).

- **Active Living Leadership** is working to increase the number of state and local elected and appointed leaders who understand and champion community design to promote active living.

- **Active for Life®: Increasing Physical Activity Levels in Adults Age 50 and Older** seeks to increase the number of American adults age 50 and older who engage in regular physical activity. (For more information see Program Results Report.)
THE PROJECT

The public relations firm Porter Novelli (Washington office) received two contracts from RWJF to develop a toolkit, *Promoting Active Living Communities: A Guide to Marketing and Communication*, for community organizing groups, RWJF grantees and elected and appointed officials to use to promote physical activity and environments favorable to physical activity.

Under grant ID# 042269, project staff conducted an "environmental scan" to gather information from experts on physically active communities and determine what information should be included in the marketing and communications toolkit. The scan consisted of 19 telephone interviews with experts on active communities: eight at the national level, four at the state level and seven at the community level.

Among the key findings of the interviews, presented in an October 2001 report to RWJF:

- The media is an important player in promoting active living and in leveraging the cause with decision-makers.
- Few resources exist to help communities plan for active living.
- There is no single model for promoting an active community but rather many possible models.
- It is essential when planning for social and physical environments conducive to active living to understand community needs and the nature of the audiences, and to get support from key decision-makers.

Project staff used the findings from these interviews and the existing tools they collected from such organizations as the CDC, AARP, and the National Center for Bicycling & Walking to help develop a prototype for the toolkit. RWJF staff and the interviewed experts reviewed the prototype and made suggestions to improve it. They agreed that the toolkit should be a primer on the development of messages and communication strategy geared to those less experienced in these areas.

Project staff revised the toolkit several times and developed a design mock-up. The second grant (ID# 042502) was used for production and dissemination of the toolkit.

With the approval of RWJF, Porter Novelli used about $22,000 remaining from the second contract to develop and implement a media campaign for RWJF's *Active Living Leadership* program. Program staff at *Active Living Leadership* had developed a calculator to estimate the financial cost of physical inactivity. Users supply basic demographic information and the tool uses estimated medical care costs, workers' compensation and lost productivity costs to come up with a single cost figure.
It allows policy-makers, local and state officials, community leaders and organizations to calculate the financial cost of physical inactivity and make informed decisions about resource allocation. The calculator was created with help from a leading econometrics expert and with funding from Fifty-Plus Lifelong Fitness, a nonprofit organization that encourages fitness and a more active lifestyle for those 50 years and older.

**RESULTS**

The project generated the following results:

- **Porter Novelli published 2,000 copies of *Promoting Active Living Communities: A Guide to Marketing and Communication***. The toolkit, which encourages users to "think like marketers," includes:
  - A step-by-step approach to planning marketing and communication programs.
  - How to motivate, influence and persuade an audience.
  - Examples from other communication programs.
  - Developing the message and how to be strategic about framing and promoting it with the media.
  - Evaluating communication efforts.
  - Resources for more information and for involving partners (see the **Appendix** for full contents of the marketing toolkit).

- **Porter Novelli developed a media campaign and disseminated a press release and audio news release in August 2004 to announce the availability of the online calculator of the cost of physical inactivity**. Preceding the release, project staff developed core messages for potential spokespeople and conducted a message review training session for them by telephone. Project staff prepared a fact sheet on the background of the calculator and a user guide, both available online. Media materials were shared with 20 other organizations that co-sponsored dissemination of the calculator with *Active Living Leadership* in their local communities. The national media campaign conducted by Porter Novelli resulted in:
  - Several articles in trade publications, including *Biotech Week* and *Obesity, Fitness & Wellness Week*.
  - Reaching 25 million radio listeners in August 2004 through the audio news release. More than 600 radio stations ran the release.

**Communications**

All told, approximately 2,000 toolkits were printed and distributed. The toolkit was distributed equally to RWJF, *Active Living Leadership* and *Active Living by Design*. Each
of the three organizations distributed the toolkit to grantees and non-grantees. Porter Novelli helped in disseminating online and print versions of the toolkit through e-mail lists and its own contacts. Staff arranged with the National Association of County and City Health Officials to make 200 toolkits available at various national conferences focusing on smart growth and community planning.

The director of *Active Living Leadership* informally promotes the toolkit and calculator and selectively distributes print copies of the toolkit at conferences she attends or at which she makes presentations, such as the California Healthy Cities and Communities Conference (April 2005) and the Governors Conference on Greenways, Blueways and Trails (May 2005).

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# APPENDIX

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Books


Reports