

Engaging Business in Teen Pregnancy/STD Prevention Efforts



Why Connect with the Business Community?

Businesses are connected to youth. Young people are often their employees and customers.

Businesses have clout and connections. When you are advocating for community change, it's good to have the clout and strong community ties that business leaders often bring to the table. Business involvement can make your efforts more visible.

Interests in common. Adolescent sexual health initiatives share certain goals with the business community:

- **Building competencies.** Many sexual health initiatives seek to expand youth development opportunities and prepare youth for adulthood. The business community is concerned with developing a strong talent pool, including young people with basic professional competencies.
- **Quality of life.** Your initiative and the business community share an orientation toward improving the quality of life within communities. Communities do well when their adolescents have opportunities to build skills, achieve their goals, and contribute. Thriving communities are good for business and help larger corporations attract high quality employees.
- **Costs to society.** Unplanned pregnancy costs us all through lost/delayed talents and contributions of youth, lost economic growth and taxes, and increased medical costs.

Talking Points for Engaging the Business Community

Describe Who You Are Succinctly

"[Our initiative] brings leaders together to help youth stay healthy, build skills, and achieve their goals. In our [city/county/community], adolescent pregnancy rates are high—[x] higher than the state average. We [have/are creating] a plan to reduce our community's high adolescent pregnancy rates by expanding access to proven education strategies, health services, and skill-building opportunities."

What's in it for Business?

Visibility, reputation, and networking: "This is a community-wide effort. To be effective, we need leaders from all sectors. By participating, you'll have opportunities to network, promote your reputation as a good corporate citizen, and increase your visibility."

An investment in youth is an investment in your future workforce: "Our project aims to help young people build competencies, including financial literacy and the skills they need for career success."

Quality of life in our community. "We want to create a community that engages young people in positive opportunities. Youth who have opportunities to learn skills and contribute are a boon to us now, and become talented workers and leaders as adults."

Identify a Range of Meaningful Roles

Business leaders may want to be involved but may not have a lot of time. Keep in mind, too, that a large corporation and a small business will have different resources to offer. Identify a range of valuable ways to get involved.

- **Less intensive roles:** Provide space for meetings or events, provide financial and in-kind support, offer stipends or scholarships for youth, invite you to speak to staff/offer a lunchtime program (e.g., parent education or teen pregnancy awareness), post hotline/helpline and public awareness posters.
- **More intensive:** Speak at an initiative event, co-sponsor a community event, provide a place where youth can obtain condoms, sponsor a youth award, convene a meeting with other business people, participate in a career exploration or financial literacy program opportunity.
- **Most intensive:** Serve on your advisory council, advocate for policy change, champion the cause, serve as a mentor to a young person, offer youth program sessions on financial literacy.

Who else in your organization is trying to engage business?

You may not be the only one in your agency who wants to involve business.

- Can you team up with your development, volunteer, or public affairs staff to engage and recognize key business leaders?
- How about your Board members—can they join your effort, or give you leads?

Tips for Including Business

1. **Get beyond money.** Don't think of the business community only in terms of deep pockets.
2. **Make them visible.** Keep in mind that the benefits to business include visibility; publicly recognize your partners at every opportunity.
3. **Be clear and to the point.** Think of your approach to business leaders as a pitch: make it brief and use language that is vivid and clear—not academic or human service speak! Use local data to bring your point home.
4. **Ask—and give options.** Ask for something specific, but give a range of 3-4 options for consideration. When choosing what to ask for, be sure you can point to benefits for their business.
5. **Choose the right messenger.** A person with connections to the business leader, or a person with recognized community standing, might be your best ambassador.

For more on community approaches to adolescent sexual health, visit the ACT for Youth Center of Excellence at http://www.actforyouth.net/sexual_health/community/