



Developing a Social Marketing Committee

Before you begin to develop a social marketing communications plan for your cooperative agreement, you need to create a social marketing committee. Please note that for most cooperative agreements, a social marketing communications plan and a social marketing committee are requirements. Some grantees who have not worked on system of care cooperative agreements before may not have heard of a social marketing committee. The following tips are intended to help you form your social marketing committee.

What is a social marketing committee?

A social marketing committee includes representatives of your community who can help focus your social marketing strategies on meeting your overall system of care goals. This group of individuals will bring perspectives from audiences throughout your community and contribute a wealth of information about needs and approaches to produce effective communication strategies.

Who should be included as social marketing committee members?

Members do not need to have a background in marketing, but should have an interest in social marketing, messaging, and an understanding of your system of care goals. There is no magic number to include, but two heads (or more!) are always better than one. The important part is that members are engaged, regularly present, in the position to make decisions, and have resources (energy, time, budget, or staff) to implement social marketing activities.

The makeup of each committee is different in every system, but there are some key members that you should include. Family and youth representatives should play a key role in your social marketing committee. It is important to also include representatives of the audiences that your system of care will be trying to reach, so that your work is audience-driven. Finally, you will find it very helpful to include your system of care evaluators as you incorporate data into your social marketing strategies.

“We say that we work to solve problems for the community. If we truly believe this, then how can we fathom developing solutions without having our community at the table?”

—Thomas Houston, social marketer, Washington, DC, System of Care

The following list provides suggestions of other representatives that you might wish to include:

- School administrators
- School staff members
- Juvenile justice representatives
- System of care cultural competence lead
- System of care youth coordinator
- System of care family coordinator
- Primary health provider
- Early childhood provider
- Substance abuse treatment provider
- Local government staff and officials

- Parent-teacher association members
- Members of other child-serving entities
- Faith-based leaders
- Community businesses
- Representatives from racial and ethnic advocacy and interest groups
- Other community partners

Certain committee members may take on more or less active roles at times, depending on your social marketing efforts and outreach to the groups they represent. Some members also may take on additional responsibilities outside of the committee, depending on the current needs and the individual committee members' availability.

How should committee meetings be conducted?

Each individual system of care should decide what works best for members regarding time of day, day of week, and how often the group meets. Some groups meet very often in the beginning as they are creating their social marketing communications plan, but then once established, may meet less often and/or hold shorter meetings. Be sure to schedule meetings when they are convenient for families and youth.

At the end of each meeting, provide your project director and committee members with an overview of the committee's goals, member responsibilities, decisions that were made, and action items. The focus of agendas and content of the meetings will depend on your members and how your system of care generally operates.

“Like any creative process, you need to bounce ideas off one another. When dealing with such important topics like children’s mental health, it is invaluable to have the eyes and ears of your colleagues, including youth and families, to give you feedback.”

—Annie Rosenthal, public relations coordinator, Chautauqua Tapestry, NY

Most importantly, as you progress...

Take time to reflect on accomplishments as your communications grow. Your social marketing committee will be responsible for periodically updating the social marketing communications plan, as it is a living document. Host group discussions about what has worked, what has not, and who is missing at the table at the end of each fiscal year. Also, remember that your social marketing TA Provider is always available for guidance, advice, and resources along the way. Once you complete your social marketing communications plan, you can send it to your system of care governance board for approval and buy-in from senior management.