Media Materials

As part of this year’s evaluation, all TeenSMART Outreach (TSO) Coordinators participated in phone interviews with UCSF staff to discuss their use of media materials to promote clinical services to teens. All 21 TSO agencies use a variety of media materials and methods to reach teens in their communities. This report summarizes key findings from these interviews.

Use of Media Materials
The most common types of media materials aimed at teens include incentives, brochures, flyers, websites, public service announcements, and advertisements. Currently, no agencies use larger advertisements such as billboards.

All agencies use a combination of methods to reach teens. Often, agencies use catchy slogans or messages in their media materials. In addition, most agencies tailor their materials according to the age or race/ethnicity of the teen population they want to reach.

Developing Media Materials
To create media materials for teens, most agencies use a combination of materials created in-house and materials ordered from outside organizations, such as Education Training Research (ETR) Associates, California Family Health Council, and the Office of Family Planning (OFP).

To develop and produce media materials, agencies rely on adult and peer TSO staff, as well as input from teens, parents, and consultants. About half of agencies use focus groups made up of teens and parents, in order to identify new topic areas and review existing materials. Agencies also utilize outside resources, such as consultants, research reports, and local public health agencies in the development process.

Coordinators shared some major challenges in developing and distributing media materials to teens, such as funding constraints, political opposition from parents and schools, and the difficulty of creating materials that are attractive to teens.

Brochures, Flyers, and Incentives
The majority of TSO agencies use brochures, flyers, and other printed materials, including referral cards, wallet cards, or “rave” cards. Printed materials are often disseminated in school settings, such as during classroom presentations, in the nurse’s office, displayed on kiosks, or given directly to teens. Agencies also share printed media at community events, during one-on-one or street outreach, in clinic waiting rooms, and through other agencies and individuals that work with youth.

Agencies distribute a wide range of incentives and promotional items to teens, including pens, key chains, lip balms, t-shirts, brushes, highlighters, bookmarks, Frisbees, water bottles, bracelets, and other small items. Incentives are often given out
During classroom presentations or one-on-one outreach, at health fairs and other community events, and in the clinic.

Because incentives are generally more expensive than printed media materials, coordinators and staff are strategic about how to share them with teens, often reserving them as prizes for participation in activities, or sharing them in smaller group or one-on-one settings.

Billboards, Advertisements, and PSAs
Approximately one-third of agencies reach teens through print advertisements, posters, bus ads, and bench ads. These ads promote clinical services and are found in locations where teens spend time, such as near clinic sites, near local schools, and along bus routes that students use. A few agencies use school PA systems or local newspapers to promote clinic events as well.

The cost of print advertising varies widely, depending on the size, duration, and location of the ads. Agencies have found less expensive ways to promote services and events, by using donated and in-kind space. Some agencies have taken advantage of “earned media” by submitting articles to local papers or attracting media attention for an event or activity.

Agencies also air Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and advertisements over local radio stations. College stations and stations that teens listen to, such as hip hop and popular music stations, are considered a great way to spread the word. Some agencies get radio station ideas directly from teen clients and staff. Radio airtime is often free for TSO agencies, especially to promote specific events in the community.

Websites
Agencies use websites to promote their services to teens, to share information about clinic hours, location, and contact information, and to explain the services that they provide. About half of agencies print their web address on other media materials, which they distribute in schools and during outreach events in the community.

A few agencies promote their websites through internet-based methods, by linking to other sites, creating an email listserv from student audiences, or using networking websites, such as www.myspace.com. Because many teens spend time on the web, emailing, networking, blogging, and playing games, agencies want to take advantage of the existing online community to promote their sites and clinics.

Maintaining and updating a website can be challenging, due to how time-consuming the process is. Coordinators also mentioned difficulties creating websites that are fun, engaging, and teen-friendly. In order to combat this challenge, they suggested making sites that are more casual and appealing to teens, with pictures of clinic staff and interactive features, such as a Q&A or “Dear Abby” section.

Media Consultants
Over half of TSO agencies have used outside consultants to design, develop, or produce media materials to reach teens. Overall, agencies have found outside experts to be very helpful in developing the agency’s ideas, making the process more productive and thorough, and offering a fresh perspective on the agency.

Challenges working with outside consultants include high cost, poor communication, and difficulties encountering ideas that aren’t appropriate to the agency’s clients or goals. Coordinators suggested working closely with consultants and developing mutually agreeable timelines and goals, to ensure a smooth, productive, and efficient process. In addition, consultants who have experience creating materials for teens and are supportive of teen pregnancy prevention can be a great asset to an agency.
Funding
Agencies use a variety of funding sources to develop and distribute media materials, including TSO grants, other agency grants, other funding from the Office of Family Planning, other clinic funds, Title X funds, private foundation support, and in-kind donations.

Many agencies have encountered challenges in securing financial support for media outreach to teens. In particular, coordinators mentioned obstacles to finding dedicated financial support for media efforts and infrastructure.

In order to overcome these barriers, coordinators shared a wealth of suggestions that are highlighted in ‘Strategies to Overcome Common Challenges,’ on page 4.

Recommendations for OFP
Coordinators shared a variety of suggestions and recommendations for OFP regarding media efforts, and requested assistance in learning how to reach teens effectively through media outreach.

- Coordinators suggested that OFP assist agencies in sharing their practices with each other, through the annual TSO meeting and at other events, such as the regional collaborative gatherings. Coordinators want to “see what other agencies are doing” and “stay in touch” about how their methods are working, so they can learn from each others’ experiences and share successful strategies.

- Coordinators suggested that OFP offer trainings and instructional guides in media methods for TSO agencies, to help them develop and distribute their messages to teens. Specifically, coordinators requested instruction in website development and in harnessing media attention to gain “earned media.”

- Coordinators requested tools, templates, and technical assistance from OFP for developing media materials. One coordinator suggested that “the state could develop a shared hard drive to place all this information [about agencies’ media efforts], as well as templates for flyers, brochures, etc. Agencies could search for materials… [and] then modify them to meet their own needs.” Another coordinator suggested that the state hire “a technical web advisor—someone agencies can talk to who can help us with setting these things up.”

- Coordinators requested data and information from OFP about what methods are successful at reaching teens throughout the state. One coordinator wanted to see “results from past messages, like the Top 10 list of what worked.”

- Overall, coordinators requested more funding for media efforts. Funding constraints are a primary barrier for agencies to create, produce, and disseminate media materials to teens. In particular, a lack of funds prevents agencies from using more expensive media methods, such as print advertisements, billboards, and radio and television commercials and PSAs. Furthermore, funding barriers prohibit many agencies from seeking help from outside experts and consultants to design and distribute materials. Coordinators requested more funding from OFP specifically to support media efforts, as well as information and resources to assist them in applying for funding from other sources.

Additional information is available through the full research report prepared by UCSF.
Strategies to Overcome Common Challenges

The following summarizes common challenges identified by TSO Coordinators, and effective strategies that agencies have used to manage and overcome these obstacles.

Challenge: Limited Resources to Devote to Media

- Advertise in small-scale media outlets, such as school newspapers, that cost less than regional radio, TV, and print ads
- Take advantage of the opportunity that local newspapers or radio stations offer to advertise local, upcoming events, such as health fairs or “Condom Week” activities, at no cost
- Use earned media, such as writing articles or Op-Eds in newspapers, that are no-cost; mention the clinic and highlight a key service available
- Use web-based forums, such as www.myspace.com, where it is free to host a website for teens
- Utilize in-house talent (existing staff with an interest in graphic design or Photoshop) to develop materials, rather than hiring an outside consultant
- Take advantage of a wider range of funding sources by developing media messages that promote adolescent health broadly, with family planning included as part of message
- Ration incentives! Bring low-cost incentives (such as pens) for the whole group, and hand out only a few high-cost incentives (such as water bottles) to teens who participate in outreach presentations
- Create your own media! Blow up small cards or flyers to poster size and post them in exam rooms, community agencies, or schools

“We’ve also used media to share stories about young people, youth volunteering, [our] teen center, etc. We try to tie our clinic into any newspaper articles and TV coverage we get.”

“Media is different because it stays with them longer than a one-time presentation. They always have a card with them. It jogs their memory when it falls out of their backpack later. They can pass it on to friends.”

Challenge: Ensuring that teens see your message and remember it

- Involve teens in the development process – ask them to identify current issues that their peers are talking about, the types of media outlets they follow, and the places to display information in the clinic
- Provide teens with something concrete (a wallet card, a key chain) that they can take with them and use at a later date
- Place media in a location that teens are likely to visit, where they can access information anonymously (for example, the web, a bus bench near school, the school newspaper, or a mall kiosk)
- Use catchy and easy to remember slogans, such as “It’s Up to Me,” “Get the Test,” or “Check Yourself”
- Understand the language proficiency and age range of your target audience and tailor your message accordingly; use ethnic media as appropriate
- Try a variety of different incentives and ask the teens what they liked best or what worked with their friends
- Create interactive activities for teens to engage in – for example, a ‘Dear Abby’ column where they can ask questions, or a web-based blog where they can discuss issues with a TSO staff person or other teens

“For our new teen-developed PSA, we are working with one [local radio] station that offered to produce the spot. They had a teen-oriented show (‘Teen Talk,’ airing weekly), and a general manager who was interested in our issues.”

“Teens are on the web! We need cool, interactive web sites. We’re impressed how web-attached teens are, even in lower-economic areas. This will boom more than we can imagine.”
Challenge: Working with schools
• Create a relationship with the school nurse and/or other school staff
• Be careful about the messages that you promote in a school – ensure that they are appropriate for all ages
• Demonstrate the value of your clinic by providing the school with information on the number of their students to whom you already provide services and the number of pregnancies or STIs prevented as a result
• Even if you can not hand out materials in schools, work with teachers, nurses, and social workers who can hand out materials for you or help teens contact you with questions
• Work in venues near schools that students are likely to frequent, such as restaurants, parks and recreation sites, sports venues, and malls

Challenge: Responding to Local Values
• Ensure that materials acknowledge the importance of parental involvement in reproductive health decisions and highlight abstinence–first and prevention–first messages
• Include local statistics about teen pregnancy and its impact, highlighting the need for services in their community
• Be sensitive to your target audience – keep messages vague if you fear a negative reaction

“[We] can’t widely advertise the messages we would like in this community because it is so conservative, so the best thing we can do is to get people to recognize [our] TeenSMART logo and instantly know that it means free reproductive health services for teens.”

“You have all these TSOs spending time and money on media. It would be great if [there was] a shared drive to place all this information, as well as templates for flyers, brochures, etc. Agencies could search for materials, so they are not reinventing the wheel. Agencies could then modify [the templates] to meet their own needs.”

Challenge: The amount of time and coordination required to develop materials
• Collaborate with other agencies that serve youth, to share the responsibility and cost of product development
• Build internal capacity to develop media within your agency – conduct trainings on grant-writing to raise funds, how to use design software, or how to conduct media advocacy – so that media is a sustainable part of your organization
• Create a referral system with other agencies – indicate that you will advertise their services if they do the same for you
• Hire a consultant to help, even if it’s only for one step of the process

“We hired a social marketer once who did in-service training with staff and some focus groups. We had heard about her as helping nonprofits, so we thought her price would be good. She understood that media needed to be sustained at low cost over time.”

“[One challenge is the] stereotypes, stigma. It’s getting much better, because we’re educating parents as well. The center used to be called ‘The Condom Place,’ so the parents got knowledge of that, word got out that this is where kids get condoms, we encourage them to have sex. [Now], when the parents come in, and see that we tutor their kids and educate them, it changed their views.”