

University of South Carolina - MATCH Project

Arnold School of Public Health and The Institute for Partnerships to Eliminate Health Disparities
Capstone Event – July 29 - 30, 2008 - Atlanta, Georgia

THEMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Many Americans living in the Southeastern and Eastern United States are unaware of the threat posed by new and emerging infectious diseases, and are unprepared should a disease outbreak affect their local communities.

These are conclusions presented by the first round of seventeen 1890 academic institutions that have received funding from the Mobilizing Against Threats to Community Health (MATCH) Project at the University of South Carolina to implement disease outbreak awareness and preparedness campaigns within local communities.

Below are additional themes and lessons learned provided by 1890 institution education and outreach specialists and their community partners:

- Data from an **audience assessment** can help determine a target audience's level of knowledge and awareness. An assessment may also point out ways to interact with a specific culture. Finally, an assessment can serve as a benchmarking measure to discern the level of impact generated by an activity.
- While new and emerging infectious diseases can spread globally, investments in **local preparedness** are needed to protect human and animal health. Preparedness should include being ready for a potentially catastrophic event, as well as developing measures to respond to and recover from an event.
- Outreach and awareness-building efforts can be maximized by **integrating with existing programs** to capitalize on educational infrastructures that are already in place. By linking to existing programs and outreach efforts, individual program goals can be met while also providing value to that collaborative partner.
- **Community partnerships** with organizations who share a similar mission or target audience are one way to expand message delivery. Benefits include leveraging other groups' expertise, leadership and resources, and bringing value to that partner. Maintaining a focus on audience needs can also energize partnerships.
- Finding the **right messengers** to augment outreach is critical in reaching specific audiences. Homemakers, community organizers, civic leaders, and subject-matter experts can all aid message delivery. Extension agents and young faculty and researchers are also ideal messengers in communities and on campuses.
- Within any community, there may be diverse audiences with varied modes of information receipt and intake. Using **multiple channels** for dissemination are critical to reaching diverse groups. MATCH Project participants' tactics include fact sheets, sharing information through events and existing programs, public service announcements, and multiple forms of media.
- While advancing levels of awareness and understanding are important, providing the **right tools** to achieve the intended behavior change are important. In addition, audiences of interest to the MATCH Project may be of an economic status that does not permit the purchase of materials for an emergency preparedness kit.
- **Awareness and understanding** can motivate actions to prepare for, respond to and recover from potential outbreaks of new and emerging infectious diseases. MATCH Project participants met audiences with no knowledge of this threat, while others had higher levels of awareness. Building understanding is critical for both lay audiences and those serving response roles during an emergency.
- Establishing **official policies and procedures** related to the management of a disease outbreak can be a significant enhancement to awareness and preparedness levels in a county, community and school system.
- Engaging key audiences and communities in developing an awareness of potential threats and the building of preparedness capacity is a chance to **identify systemic problems** within a community or organization. Outcomes could include enhanced communication capabilities and outreach mechanisms, and connecting parties responsible for emergency management.