

# Appendix I: Using Strategic Communications

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## Appendix I

# Using Strategic Communications to Ensure the Success of a Self-Direction Program<sup>1</sup>

As with any program, a new self-direction program will have its supporters, opponents, and those who fall somewhere in between.<sup>2</sup> The primary goal of any communications strategy is to convince stakeholders that self-direction is a valuable and desirable addition to the long-term service options currently available.

The ultimate goal—beyond designing and implementing a new program—is to attract and enroll sufficient eligible individuals to sustain the program, providing the base for future expansion. Creating a strategic communications plan for the new program will help to achieve this goal.

Currently, 15 states have self-direction programs begun or expanded with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Cash & Counseling (C&C) Grants Program. All have used a variety of communications strategies to help build support for, launch, and sustain their programs.<sup>3</sup> Based on their experiences, as well as the technical assistance provided by the C&C National Program Office (NPO), this appendix describes the essential communications activities states should consider when developing a new self-direction program. These activities include:

- Building support and creating advocates for the new program
- Crafting and delivering effective messages about the program
- Disseminating the program's messages
- Dealing with opposition and countering resistance to the program
- Reaching out to potential participants and their families, particularly those immediately eligible for the new program, to provide them with information and to encourage their enrollment.

When thinking about communications strategies, a good first step is to review other states' sample communications plans. For example, West Virginia's communications plan for its self-direction program, called Personal Options, focuses on a specific goal (enrolling 10 percent of eligible waiver participants) and describes strategies for reaching that goal, including identifying target audiences, understanding and addressing potential opposition, developing communications activities, and establishing a timeline.<sup>4</sup>

Myriad templates for creating communications plans are available on the Internet<sup>5</sup> and this appendix includes links to sample communications materials created by

C&C grantees and the C&C NPO, which may be used by other states as templates for developing new materials.

Whichever approach a state uses, it is important to view communications as an ongoing process that requires creativity, both consistency and flexibility, and a commitment from the outset to use language that stakeholders can easily understand.

## A. Building Support and Developing Advocates for the Program

Among the first steps in any formal or informal communications plan is a “stakeholder analysis”—identifying key stakeholders and determining their needs. Stakeholders are those people who are in a position to influence the new program and whose support and participation are essential to its success. (See Box)

Individuals eligible to participate in the program—and their primary caregivers—are its primary stakeholders. Additional key stakeholders include those who will administer or work in the new program, other service providers (who may oppose the program), state staff, state policymakers, and others.

### Examples of Stakeholders

- Potential participants and their families, particularly those immediately eligible for the new program
- Organizations that represent potential participants, such as aging and disability advocacy groups
- Caregivers and the organizations that represent them and their interests
- Aging and disability provider networks, such as Area Agencies on Aging and Independent Living Centers
- Providers of services and supports for the program’s target population
- Legislators and staff, the governor and staff, Medicaid agency staff, and the new program’s staff and administrators
- Individuals who will work in the program, including counselors, case managers, financial management service providers, and state outreach workers.

A stakeholder analysis consists of (1) creating a list of everyone who has a potential involvement, investment, or interest in the new program; (2) analyzing their current level of knowledge about, interest in, or opposition to the program; (3) determining how best to educate them about—and generate their enthusiasm

and support for—the new program; (4) identifying individuals to serve on the program’s advisory groups; and (5) enlisting the support of key stakeholders who can effectively disseminate information about the program to target audiences.

### ***Strategies to Reach and Involve Stakeholders***

Stakeholders are always the primary targets of any communications effort on behalf of a new program. Early communications efforts targeted to stakeholders may take the form of mailings and advertising to let potential participants and their families know that a new self-direction program will soon be available or presentations about the program at annual meetings of provider organizations or one-on-one meetings with key state personnel and local legislators.

Inviting stakeholders to serve on a program’s advisory panel not only engages them in its planning and implementation, but also creates a group of knowledgeable individuals who can provide valuable insights, such as the best channels to reach various target audiences or the most effective messages for particular groups. Communicating with potential participants, for example, requires a very different approach than does communicating with state legislators or representatives of provider organizations. Having advisory panel members who represent all the major stakeholders will help program staff target communications efforts more effectively. Stakeholders who are invested in the success of a new program can also help counter opposition and eliminate challenges to the program by carrying a positive message about the program to many different audiences.

Generally, states establish a single advisory panel for stakeholders that can include a majority of potential participants and their family members. Some choose, to create a separate advisory panel solely for potential participants, whose specific charge is to help ensure that their perspectives are incorporated into every program process and component—from design to implementation to outreach and enrollment. Potential participants are the single most important stakeholder group for a new self-direction program and soliciting their input from the beginning will give credibility to the program. See Chapter 3 of this Handbook for an in-depth discussion about involving participants.

### ***Reaching Key Audiences***

In addition to stakeholders, a communications strategy needs to focus on reaching key audiences. One key audience is the media, including major statewide media outlets and local media, as well as targeted media such as organizational newsletters and sponsored websites. Another is state and local opinion leaders, including any influential persons whose support can bring attention and lend credibility to the new program. The support of opinion leaders can also help the state reach a broader audience than is generally possible with communications through usual state channels. (See box below.)

Some opinion leaders—such as the state governor, the well-respected head of a local provider association, or individuals active in local advocacy organizations—are also stakeholders. Whether a stakeholder or not, opinion leaders can be enlisted to help reach and influence other stakeholders, their colleagues, constituents, and others. Opinion leaders bring credibility to any communications effort because they attract attention and people listen to what they have to say.

### **Examples of Opinion Leaders**

- A Governor or a high-ranking member of a Governor’s staff
- State legislators, including relevant committee chairs and members
- Medicaid, Aging, and Disabilities Program directors and relevant staff, including press officers
- Heads of other relevant press offices, including a Governor’s press secretary
- Heads of aging, disability, caregiver, and other relevant advocacy groups
- Heads of local long-term services and supports provider associations and individual provider agencies
- Relevant leaders and/or researchers at universities or colleges, such as deans of schools of social work, nursing, or medicine
- Local government officials
- Influential statewide and local business leaders, especially those who are active in state politics and in their communities
- Influential religious leaders
- A newspaper publisher, editor, popular columnist, or other influential media representatives
- Well-known personalities who may be willing to talk about their own personal or family experiences with long-term services and/or caregiving.

In the early days of Arkansas’ self-direction program, state staff successfully enlisted the support of the Governor, who, after a few short meetings, recognized the potential benefits of the program for people with disabilities and their families. While his endorsement was made clear on multiple occasions, it culminated with a signed letter extolling the program to potential participants. The Governor’s endorsement represented a “tipping point” for Arkansas’ program—the point at which it gained broader recognition and significant momentum.

Enlisting the early support of opinion leaders—especially politicians whose support is critical to the program’s success—will help to ensure that they will advocate for the program even in the face of resistance or opposition from provider organizations. Additional information for dealing with provider resistance can be found in Section D of this Appendix.

### **Recruiting Opinion Leaders in Michigan**

In 2007, representatives from Michigan’s self-direction program traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet and establish relationships with legislative staff of the State’s Senators and two of its Congressional Representatives. State staff prepared for the meetings by developing and practicing their key messages, and deciding what specific requests they would make to the legislators. They provided brief background materials in advance of the meeting and brought additional materials with them.

During the brief meetings, they asked each legislator to share information about the new self-direction program through their websites and their local offices. They also asked the Senators to sign a joint letter supporting the program that could be sent to potential participants statewide. All of the legislators agreed to these requests and program staff moved quickly to follow up on the agreed upon actions.

## **B. Crafting and Delivering Effective Messages**

Before meeting with decision makers, preparing presentations for stakeholder audiences, and/or developing informational materials about the new program, state staff should craft key messages about the program for each target audience. In addition to providing basic information, key messages explain why the target audience should care about the new program.

Taking the time to develop effective messages will help program staff to:

- Ensure that all points are made clearly and succinctly,
- Ensure the accuracy of information and reduce misunderstandings,
- Assume control over the discussion and/or information being presented, and
- Generate support for the new self-direction program.

### ***Developing Effective Messages***

Message development is often a team effort, and group brainstorming is an effective way to start the process. Begin by listing stakeholder audiences and

then discuss the most important messages for each. Start with the main ideas and develop messages to communicate those ideas. Once several draft messages have been developed, refine and shorten them and select the key messages. The final product should be a succinct set of messages that clearly communicates the most salient points about the new self-direction program to any given audience.

Several additional suggestions for crafting effective messages follow.

- ***Create three or four main messages and use them repeatedly and consistently.*** Don't overwhelm audiences with too much information. Development of supporting messages is also important, but the focus should be on delivering main messages memorably.
- ***Use messages that are clear, compelling, accurate, and short.*** Use precise and compelling words and short sentences for greatest impact.
- ***Avoid jargon, technical information, nuances, or complexities.*** Self-direction is a complex concept. It is best to assume that audience members have never heard of it and try to explain it accordingly.
- ***Anticipate difficult questions and prepare answers before they're asked.*** Develop a supplemental set of messages that are essentially brief, clear, accurate responses to challenging questions.
- ***Always pre-test messages on sample audience members.*** Some states held formal, professionally facilitated focus groups with stakeholders—such as potential participants and their families—to determine which draft messages resonated most with them. Others conducted informal message testing activities, such as seeking feedback on messages from colleagues, relatives, and friends. Focus groups can also be used to pre-test program materials, such as logos, brochures, and participant handbooks.
- ***Revisit and refine messages to ensure effectiveness.*** Even pre-tested messages can sometimes fall flat. If certain messages are not working well, ask sample audience members for feedback and refocus or refine the ineffective messages based on their input.

The states that received C&C grants have all crafted effective messages. A good example of their work is Minnesota's "Key Talking Points" document, which was developed to help staff use clear and consistent language when discussing the self-direction program.<sup>6</sup> One of Minnesota's main messages about its program—called Consumer-Directed Community Supports—succinctly communicates the important benefits of the program: "Consumer Directed Community Supports is a well-tested and proven service option that can dramatically improve consumer satisfaction and quality of life."

## ***Delivering Effective Messages***

Once developed, good messages are only as effective as their delivery. Below are suggestions for delivering effective messages, whether in presentations to large groups or in one-on-one meetings.

- ***Practice delivering messages.*** Role-playing exercises can help the presenter tremendously, especially if a partner asks difficult questions or questions that stray from the point. Consider formal presentation training for principal program staff.
- ***Relax and do not be intimidated.*** Meeting with key stakeholders or presenting to large groups are opportunities not moments to be feared.
- ***Be clear and concise.*** Focus on the two or three main messages you want the audience to remember.
- ***Adapt messages as needed.*** Remember that the same messages do not work for every audience; be sure you are using messages that are relevant to your audience.
- ***Speak simply and clearly.*** Do not use technical terms and other jargon.
- ***Use effective speakers and send the best messenger.*** Assign speakers who are comfortable talking to others and those who are most likely to connect with a given audience. While the message is important, an effective and appealing messenger can help convince people who may be skeptical or defensive and defuse potential resistance.
- ***Tell brief stories about program participants.*** People are moved by stories and the emotion in them more than they are by data. The NPO and several C&C states have developed presentations that incorporate consumers' personal stories and photos to help communicate the need for and/or benefits of self-direction.
- ***Flag main messages with transitional phrases and restate them in several ways,*** for example, "The key thing is..." , "What's important to remember is..."
- ***Anticipate tough questions and practice the answers.*** Always be prepared to respond to challenges and never get caught off guard. And always have specific action steps in mind if someone suddenly asks "How can I help?"
- ***Be prepared for meetings that do not follow the planned script.*** Assess the audience, be prepared for the subject to change, and learn how to redirect the discussion.
- ***Bring Supporting Materials*** to all meetings and presentations, no matter how

large or small. Information on developing these materials is discussed later.

## C. Developing and Disseminating Program Information

Once program staff have identified stakeholder audiences and developed key messages, the next step is to begin thinking about the best ways to disseminate information about the new program. Whether the program is in the earliest planning stages or is ready to begin enrollment, program staff need to know how and when to use basic communications tools. This section provides advice on developing informational materials and working with the media.

### *Developing Informational Materials*

One of the most frequent questions program staff will hear when talking to others about the new program is: “Do you have any materials on the program?” Developing and providing information in multiple formats helps stakeholders and other audiences to better understand the program. Here is a list of useful materials and tips for creating them.

- ***Program name and logo.*** These items will help establish a unique identity for the new program. They will help target audience members differentiate the new program from already existing long-term service options. A catchy, easily recalled name and/or logo are particularly helpful for potential participants and their families, who can be overwhelmed by the variety of similarly named (and heavily acronymed) government programs available to them.

For example, with input provided by focus groups, New Mexico invested significant effort in creating a distinct, consumer-friendly, cross-cultural identity for its self-direction program—called “Mi Via” (or “My Way”).



The name and logo for New Mexico’s C&C program, Mi Via, were carefully created through an inclusive process that solicited input from stakeholders statewide.

- ***Fact sheets and frequently asked questions*** (FAQs) with answers about the new program are extremely helpful and relatively easy and inexpensive documents to produce. Fact sheets should explain the program’s primary

features in easy-to-read language on a single page in bullet form. An FAQ can be longer and should include the questions that readers are most likely to ask with succinct answers. Iowa has developed an excellent consumer fact sheet and an FAQ for its self-direction program.<sup>7</sup>

- **Letters and postcards** are important documents to develop, particularly to promote the self-direction program to potential participants and their families. More information and samples of these documents are provided in Section E of this appendix.
- **Brochures.** An easy-to-read, visually interesting, versatile brochure that explains the new program clearly and answers the most important questions will be very useful to program staff. It is the document that will be used the most, and should be developed with multiple audiences in mind. It should present information about the program in clear, conversational language; include quotes from influential opinion leaders and/or consumers; and feature engaging photographs of the types of people and their families who could benefit from the program.
- **Brief user-friendly publications.** The C&C NPO developed a publication describing the initial findings of the original three-state C&C Demonstration and Evaluation (CCDE)—along with photographs and stories of participants. The second round of states receiving C&C grants used this publication to explain the C&C model to stakeholders, the media, and a variety of audiences.<sup>8</sup> Because it provided background information about self-direction and the C&C program model, states were able to focus their communications efforts instead on preparing written materials for potential participants and their families. New Mexico<sup>9</sup> and Iowa<sup>10</sup> both developed brochures targeted toward potential participants and their families, but which can also be used to explain the program to providers and the media.
- **Websites.** An easy-to-navigate website is essential for any new program. While some potential participants and their families may not have access to a computer, a website is an effective and efficient method for providing current information to those who do and all other audiences, including state government officials and their staff, media, providers, and consumer advocates. New Mexico has an excellent website for its Mi Via program, which is clear and easy-to-use.<sup>11</sup>
- **Videos.** Videos are an effective supplement or alternative to written materials because they make information about the program “come alive.” Videos can be made available through program websites and/or distributed with written materials. Kentucky,<sup>12</sup> Minnesota,<sup>13</sup> and New Mexico<sup>14</sup> created educational videos about their programs. The NPO also created three videos that tell the stories of participants in Florida,<sup>15</sup> New Jersey,<sup>16</sup> and Minnesota,<sup>17</sup> and how the program has benefited them.

## ***Working with the Media***

The media are both an audience and a means to reach other audiences. As an audience, newspaper editors, columnists, talk radio hosts, and other journalists need to understand and see the value of the new program so that they can, in turn, help to educate others about it. As a means for reaching other audiences, the media are very influential and are relied upon as sources of information for everyone from state government officials and their staff to providers, potential participants, and their families.

Examples of various media-related activities that can be used to disseminate information about a new program follow.

- ***Phone calls and one-on-one meetings.*** In most states, generally a few healthcare journalists cover aging and disability issues. As they will likely be interested in writing about the new program, it is worthwhile for program staff to establish relationships with them, call and tell them about the new program, and offer to meet with them in person and become a resource.
- ***Letters to the Editor.*** Newspaper readers send letters to the editor in reaction to a recent news story, column, or editorial. If misinformation about a self-direction program appears in the paper, write a letter to the editor and correct it. Or if you read a story that easily could have mentioned self-direction, but didn't, write a letter to the editor and explain the oversight. Newspapers receive more letters than they can print, but the odds improve when letters are brief and to the point. Submit them within a day or two of the date that the original article appeared. See local newspapers for examples of such letters.
- ***Op-eds.*** Op-eds are opinion pieces that appear on the page opposite the editorials page (thus the term "op-ed"). Intended to influence public opinion, an op-ed piece should make a single point very well. The topic should be timely and relevant to current events, and will be most effective if the article is authored by someone recognized as an authority on the subject.

The governor, a Medicaid director, a program counselor, or participant could put his or her name on a compelling op-ed in favor of the new self-direction program. Op-eds should state their main point up front; use short, clear, active voice sentences; tell a story, if possible; and make specific recommendations. Check with the newspaper regarding submission procedures and requirements, but op-eds should generally be no more than 600–750 words. An op-ed template is available on the C&C website.<sup>18</sup>

- ***News Releases.*** News releases are one- to two-page documents that report a news event, such as the launch of a new self-direction program, and also provide contact and background information as well as quotes from relevant commentators. News releases present the most important information up

front, with details regarding “who, what, when, where, why, and how” supplied in the first two or three paragraphs, and quotes and supplemental background information in the remaining paragraphs.

It is important to use standard news release formats and specify whether the information is “for immediate release” or if it is “embargoed” until a specific date and time. News releases can be sent to reporters via mail, fax, or email, and a follow up phone call is always necessary. A sample news release template is available in a Communications Tool Kit available on the C&C website.<sup>19</sup>

### **Communications Tool Kit**

The C&C NPO developed a Communications Tool Kit that includes templates for op-eds, press releases, and other materials.

The tool kit is available at <http://www.cashandcounseling.org/resources/20060519-134758/>

- **Press Conferences.** A press conference is a special event in which news is officially released to gathered reporters. Successful press conferences can be difficult to achieve because reporters are very busy and would rather receive information at their desks through news releases. A press conference to launch a new program is feasible only if the governor or another high-ranking state official is making the announcement, and even then, there are no guarantees that the event will be well attended or reported in the newspapers or broadcast on radio or television.

Consider hiring public relations (PR) professionals to manage the event and ensure that they issue a media advisory one week in advance, letting reporters know what will be announced, who will be speaking, and when and where the event will take place. Hold the event mid-morning, and be sure to call reporters in the days leading up to the event to notify and/or remind them. Create a press kit of materials to hand out at the event, including a news release, fact sheet or FAQ document, brochure, background on the speakers, and a list of potential interviewees and their contact information, e.g., participants who will speak favorably about the program. See box below for more information about how PR professionals can help.

- **Television.** Self-direction can make a good television news story if participants are willing to be filmed receiving help at home from their workers. A TV station in Rhode Island did a story about that state’s self-direction program featuring local participants. It is a good idea to create and maintain a database of participants who are having a good experience

with the new program and are willing to talk about it with others, including the media. This will make it easier to respond to reporters' requests for individuals to interview. Arkansas, for example, asks participants for permission to share their names and contact information with the media during the initial assessment.

### **Professional Assistance with Public Relations**

Public relations professionals—whether from a state agency's communications department or a hired PR firm—have valuable communications expertise and can help launch a new program in the following ways.

- Helping conduct a stakeholder analysis and strategize around how best to build support and create advocates for the program.
- Helping develop the program's informational materials, including name, logo, fact sheets, brochures, videos, and website.
- Developing a detailed communications plan for the program, which specifies key audiences, key messages, and the best ways to disseminate the messages.
- Writing and distributing a press release to reporters announcing the launch of the program (or planning a press conference), and arranging media interviews for the program's representatives.
- Helping prepare program representatives for media interviews as well as sitting in on interviews and, afterward, providing feedback on how to improve message delivery in subsequent interviews.
- Editing and placing op-ed articles.

## **D. Dealing with Opposition and Countering Resistance**

Program staff may question the need to invest so much time and energy in the communications activities discussed so far. But, assuming limited government resources for the new program, an early investment in recruiting supporters and developing and delivering strong messages may be the best way to ensure the program's long-term success. Not everyone is supportive of self-direction programs, particularly some providers who express doubts about participants' abilities to manage the responsibilities of the program or who worry about losing their clients or staff. Some opposition may be powerful and well-organized. Most, if not all, states with a self-direction program have experienced some opposition to the program.

Provider opposition to self-direction can be obvious, active, and organized. Program staff might see newspaper op-eds denouncing the program or hear from legislators that the new program is a threat to home health agencies in their districts and to participants' health and welfare. Opposition can also be scattered and less easily detected, possibly coming from individual home care workers or case managers in the traditional service system voicing negative opinions to their clients who might be eligible for the new self-direction program. Frequently it is both, and program staff should assume that it is occurring or will occur on some level.

To help program staff defuse and counter resistance, the C&C NPO surveyed several states to ask what lessons they have learned about dealing with opposition and what messages they have found most effective in reaching providers who oppose a new self-direction program.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Lessons Learned from the C&C States About Countering Provider Resistance***

- Take an active approach rather than reacting to problems. To communicate messages effectively, do not rely on phone calls or letters. Seek out and meet with provider groups in person before any issues arise.
- Enlist providers who see the benefits of self-direction to help deliver information about the new program to other providers. Recruit these providers as early as possible, for example, as soon as the stakeholder analysis is completed.
- Educate providers about the positive outcomes of self-direction. Many are genuinely concerned about the safety and well-being of their clients.
- Provide accurate information to provider organizations. Get on their meeting agendas and make clear and compelling presentations about the benefits of self-direction. Take ample amounts of informational materials for audience members.
- Tell stories and show photos or videos of participants who have benefited from self-direction. Help providers see for themselves that the program can work.
- Address health and welfare concerns directly. Stakeholders want to know how the program will ensure health and welfare and control fraud and abuse. Answer these questions immediately.
- Exchange information with providers. When meeting with providers, ask questions and encourage their input. Do not make it a one-way presentation.
- Schedule a self-direction outreach or enrollment visit when agency staff are at a participant's home. Doing so includes them in the educational process and can help to lessen resistance.

- Invite home care industry representatives to serve on the advisory group for the new self-direction program. Be open and listen to and address their concerns.
- Understand providers' concerns so they will be viewed as partners in the long-term service system, not the enemy.

### **Messages that Resonate with Providers:**

- ***There is enough work for everyone.*** Tell providers: “There is more demand than current providers can satisfy. We can help.”
- ***Self-Direction could result in new referrals for providers.*** Tell providers: “We’ll send you clients who could be better served by the traditional service system.”
- ***Current providers know best who wants to self direct.*** Tell providers: “Send us the clients who aren’t satisfied with your services.”
- ***Self-direction will not put providers out of business.*** Tell providers: “Your dissatisfied customers are our best customers.”
- ***In the current labor market, home health aides are a precious and dwindling resource.*** Tell providers: “You need to conserve your workforce. This program will relieve the pressure and allow you to make the best use of your employees.”
- ***Self-direction can help home care agencies focus on the clients whose needs they are best able to meet.*** Tell providers: “Self-direction can help you become more efficient and improve your bottom line.”
- ***Self-direction has achieved its “tipping point” and is being implemented in virtually every state.*** Tell providers: “Self-direction is here to stay. Let’s figure out how we can best work together.”

#### **Countering Resistance Tool Kit**

The C&C NPO has developed a tool kit containing sample materials and advice on countering provider resistance. The tool kit is available on the C&C website (<http://www.cashandcounseling.org/resources/20080415-145147>).

## E. Reaching Potential Participants and Encouraging Enrollment

It bears repeating that the most important stakeholders—and the primary target audience for communications efforts—are the individuals who are eligible to enroll in the new program. The program, after all, is for them, and its overall success will be largely dependent on how many of them choose to enroll and remain in the program.

Given that so many people with disabilities are dependent on family members for support and care, families are the second most important target audience. Family members, especially the adult children of frail elderly parents and the parents of children and adults with developmental disabilities, will heavily influence or make the decision to enroll in the program—and many are likely to be paid caregivers or representative decision makers in the program.

Reaching potential participants and enrolling those who are eligible has been a major challenge for the 12 states that received the second round of C&C grants. Helpful suggestions based on their experience with outreach, education, and enrollment activities follow.

### ***Ideas for Reaching Potential Participants and Their Families***

- ***Letters and postcards.*** Most of the 12 states have developed and distributed personal letters<sup>21</sup>—Arkansas’ and Florida’s were signed by the Governor—and/or informational postcards<sup>22</sup> addressed to eligible individuals. These materials inform them about the new program and tell them how to obtain more information.
- ***Phone calls.*** Create a pre-recorded, automated phone message from the Governor or another trusted name and broadcast it to the phone numbers of eligible individuals. An increasing number of communities are using automated telephone calls to reach residents on a variety of topics.
- ***Targeted newsletter stories or advertisements.*** Think about the numerous ways that individuals and their families receive information and use it. Develop brief news stories or advertisements to appear in church or senior center newsletters, local community newspapers, and through other local information channels. Public service announcements aired on local radio stations and TV stations can also reach the target audiences.
- ***Partner with relevant organizations.*** Minnesota, for example, is partnering with the Meals on Wheels program to distribute materials to seniors about its self-direction program, and with Independent Living Centers to provide information to the individuals they serve.
- ***Communicate through trusted sources.*** After focus groups identified them as trusted sources of information for older persons, Arkansas sent personalized

letters to individual physicians, pharmacists, and ministers to enlist their help in telling seniors about the new self-direction program.<sup>23</sup>

- ***Create a statewide network of “peer” counselors.*** Once the new program is operational, participants and their families can be a good source of information and support for potential participants. In Florida, for example, an active network of parents of children with developmental disabilities provides information to eligible families who are not yet enrolled in or who are new to the program.

### ***Tips for Communicating with Potential Participants and Their Families***

- ***Keep informational materials short, compelling, and easy-to-read.*** Minnesota, for example, developed a brief, engaging “quiz” to help eligible individuals and their families determine if the program might be a good fit for them.<sup>24</sup>
- ***Use testimonials from participants.*** Enlist satisfied participants as advocates and have them write endorsement letters or call individuals who want to talk to someone who is already enrolled.<sup>25</sup>
- ***Pre-test materials to ensure they’re user-friendly.*** As mentioned earlier, New Mexico used consumer focus groups to help develop its program name and logo. Pre-testing all program materials, particularly important documents like participant handbooks, can help to ensure their effectiveness.
- ***Use participants’ photographs and quotes.*** It is important to put a human face on program materials, particularly because the logistics of a self-direction program can be complex and confusing.
- ***Make information available when needed.*** It is not possible to know when an individual or family member will hear about your program and want information. Making information available whenever needed through toll-free telephone numbers and websites is important.
- ***Identify and remove enrollment barriers.*** Successful enrollment requires more than informing individuals and their families about the new program. The program itself must be well-designed and offer clear benefits to participants, and, most importantly, the enrollment process should be easy to understand and navigate. See Chapter 4 for information on factors that can discourage rather than encourage enrollment.

If program resources for outreach, education, and enrollment activities are limited, states can apply for grants to supplement available funds. Many states used Systems Change grants to fund such activities for newly established self-direction programs.

## Citations, Additional Information, and Web Addresses

- 1 Teri Larson is the author of this Appendix.
- 2 This appendix uses the term “program.” However, in some states, a new self-direction option is not a separate program but an addition to an existing program.
- 3 Many other states have self-direction programs, which were supported in part by the CMS-funded Systems Change Grants Program. Several of these states used their grants to fund communication strategies for the new self-direction program.
- 4 West Virginia Bureau of Senior Services (2005). *West Virginia Personal Options Communications Plan*. Available at <http://www.cashandcounseling.org/resources/20060209-145455/WestVirginiaPersonalOptionsCommunicationsPlan2.doc>
- 5 For examples, search the Internet using key phrases such as “sample communications plan” or “communications plan template.” See also: Burness Communications (2006). *Cash & Counseling Communications Toolkit*. Available at <http://www.cashandcounseling.org/resources/20060519-134758/>
- 6 Minnesota Department of Human Services (2006). *Consumer Directed Community Supports Key Talking Points*. Available at <http://www.cashandcounseling.org/resources/20060404-120851/talkingpts.pdf>
- 7 Iowa Department of Human Services (2006). *Is the Consumer Choices Option for You?* Available at <http://www.cashandcounseling.org/resources/20061106-103122/HCBSfactsheet102606.pdf>  
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