

Selling Healthy Lifestyles

Using Social Marketing to Promote Change and Prevent Disease

A recent analysis from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reiterates what many of us already know: our unhealthy lifestyle choices are literally killing us (CDC 2003). The development of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes is largely the result of behavioral factors such as tobacco use, poor diets, and physical inactivity. Despite modest improvements in the overall health of the nation, unhealthy behaviors are responsible for more than a third of all deaths in the U.S. each year (McGinnis and Foege 1993).

Social marketing is increasingly being applied to the promotion of healthier behaviors and the prevention of chronic diseases. Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing techniques to the solution of social problems where the bottom line is behavior change (Andreasen 1995). It has been used to help people quit smoking or never start, and has also been used to help people eat a healthier diet and get more exercise.

SOCIAL MARKETING PRINCIPLES AND PROCESS

Definitions and descriptions of social marketing often refer to the so-called *Four Ps* of commercial marketing: product, price, place, and promotion. In social marketing, these concepts provide a framework for thinking about the behavior change being promoted by the social marketing campaign (product), the costs and benefits of the behavior change as they are perceived by the consumer (price), the locations where decisions about behavior are made (place), and the various vehicles available for communicating the messages of the campaign to the consumer (promotion).

Social marketers start with a particular goal in mind, for example, preventing cardiovascular disease or reducing overweight and obesity. They then use a structured approach to understand the issue and their target population, develop and test effective strategies and messages, and implement and evaluate their campaigns. To accomplish each step in the process, social marketers use particular techniques for conducting market research, defining target populations, crafting messages, and monitoring campaign implementation.

A distinguishing feature of social marketing is its intensive focus on the needs of the consumers of the campaign's messages and materials. Social marketers use focus groups, surveys, interviews, and other methods to learn about the values, beliefs, motivations, and decisionmaking styles of their target audience. This information is then used to inform the development of campaign strategies and messages.



WHEN TO USE SOCIAL MARKETING

Through their grantmaking and other work, health grantmakers often gain valuable knowledge about health issues, populations, and the barriers that keep people from living healthier lives. There are several criteria that health grantmakers can use to determine if social marketing is a logical next step in their efforts to improve health.

- *Social marketing can be used when the objective is individual behavior change* – Social marketing is most appropriately used when the solution to a problem ultimately depends on individuals making a change in their behavior.
- *Social marketing is an appropriate choice when the behavior change is a high-involvement behavior* – Typically, social marketing is used to target high-involvement behaviors, which are defined as entrenched behaviors where change requires the consumer to take significant risks or incur significant costs (Andreasen 1995).
- *Social marketing is an appropriate choice when a comprehensive approach is needed* – Changing high-involvement behaviors typically requires a comprehensive approach that involves multiple channels, components, and partners. Effective social marketing campaigns tie together the many pieces needed to motivate and support people considering or making behavior changes.

- *Social marketing can be used when certain ethical requirements are met* – Attempts to influence behavior raise ethical questions related to the right of individuals to make choices, who benefits from the behavior change, whether potential harms are disclosed, and whether demands for behavior change are being distributed equitably across populations. Grantmakers using social marketing must be willing to discuss ethical implications, both within their organizations, as well as with the intended target population.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRANTMAKERS

Social marketing is a powerful technique for promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing chronic disease. Grantmakers can use social marketing to help individuals make behavioral changes that will improve their health and their quality of life. They can also use social marketing to promote policy and environmental changes that help people be successful in their efforts to lead healthier lives.

► *Using Social Marketing for Individual Behavior*

Change – The Kansas Health Foundation has used social marketing as part of its efforts to improve the health of children in Kansas. To date, the foundation has developed three social marketing campaigns. Two of them, *Simple Acts* and *Take a second. Make a difference* were aimed at promoting positive youth development and closer connections between adults and the children in their families and communities. The third campaign, *Take It Outside*, was designed to promote awareness of the dangers of secondhand smoke and encourage smokers to smoke outside the home to limit harmful effects on children. The foundation based the development of each campaign on research into the problems facing children in Kansas and possible solutions, as well as research to develop an understanding of the target audiences for each of the campaigns. Evaluations of *Simple Acts* and *Take It Outside* found that the campaigns were effective in raising awareness of the health issues facing children.

The American Legacy Foundation has also used social marketing to influence individual behavior. The foundation's **truth**[®] campaign is an award-winning effort designed to prevent youth smoking by exposing the tobacco industry's marketing and manufacturing practices, as well as highlighting the toll of tobacco. The campaign is based on research showing that teens start smoking to express independence and rebelliousness, and that they care more about being manipulated by corporations than they do about smoking's long-term health effects. As a result, **truth**[®] uses messages that provide alternative ways for teens to express independence and rebellion, and that appeal to their desire to avoid manipulation by the tobacco industry.

Other grantmakers support social marketing through their grantmaking programs. For example, The California Endowment provided support for a social marketing campaign aimed at improving the diet and activity levels of California adolescents. *Food on the Run* focuses on building adolescents' knowledge and skills regarding healthy eating and physical activity, and also works to influence the environments in California high schools to increase access to healthy foods and physical activity options.

► *Using Social Marketing for Policy and Environmental*

Change – The Washington Dental Service Foundation is using social marketing to promote policy and environmental changes that will improve the oral health of the population of the state of Washington. *Citizens' Watch for Oral Health* started by analyzing the way oral health is perceived by the public and policymakers. It then crafted messages for the social marketing campaign that connect oral health to overall health in people's minds. The messages are also designed to move the discussion about oral health from a focus on individual behavior to a focus on policy and environmental changes (for example, funding for prevention and treatment services or fluoridation of water) that can improve oral health. Since its inception in 2000, *Citizens' Watch for Oral Health* has made significant progress toward its goals. For example, working with a broad-based coalition, it was successful in maintaining funding for children's oral disease prevention programs in 2003, despite a state budget deficit that necessitated significant cutbacks in other programs.

GRANTMAKER PUBLICATIONS ON SOCIAL MARKETING AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET

- *Issue Brief: Social Marketing Campaigns* is a publication of the Missouri Foundation for Health, available on-line at <http://www.mffh.org/SocialMarketingCampaignsExternalVersion.pdf>.
- *Selling Change: Social Marketing* is a publication of St. Luke's Health Initiatives in Arizona, available on-line at <http://www.slhi.org/comdev/comcon/cc-01fall.pdf>.
- *Social Marketing and Public Health: Lessons from the Field* is a publication of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Turning Point Initiative*, available on-line at http://www.turningpointprogram.org/Pages/smc_lessons_from_field.pdf.
- *Social Marketing as a Grantmaking Strategy for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity* is a publication of the Sunflower Foundation: Health Care for Kansans, available on-line at http://www.sunflowerfoundation.org/flash/pdf/social_marketing.pdf.

Grantmakers In Health sponsored an Issue Dialogue on May 20, 2004 to explore how health grantmakers can use social marketing techniques to help people adopt and sustain healthier behaviors. A background paper prepared for meeting participants will be synthesized with information from the day's presentations and discussion, and published as a GIH *Issue Brief* in the fall of 2004. The meeting, this *Issue Focus*, and the upcoming *Issue Brief* were made possible through the support of the American Legacy Foundation and the Kansas Health Foundation.

SOURCES

Andreasen, Alan R., *Marketing Social Change. Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Health, United States, 2003 with Chartbook on Trends in the Health of Americans* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

McGinnis, J. Michael, and William H. Foege, "Actual Causes of Death in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270(18):2207-2212, November 10, 1993.