Six Simple and Inexpensive Strategies to Continue Building Outreach Staff Skills

Outreach programs go through busy and slow periods throughout the year. If your organization expects a slow period, consider the following low-cost strategies to build your team’s skills and aptitude for serving the community. These six educational opportunities will keep your staff motivated and well-informed.

1. **Schedule Meetings with Social Service Agencies**

   Though individuals you serve may be eligible for various social services, eligibility and application requirements constantly change. It is important for outreach staff to continually educate themselves about eligibility requirements, enrollment procedures, and information for retaining benefits. When staff are not busy, encourage them to meet with agencies to establish referral processes and explore the possibility for collaborating on a project.

2. **Attend a Brown Bag Lunch Presentation Hosted by Clinicians**

   Clinicians have formal training on specific health topics, prevention strategies, and disease treatment. Capitalize on clinicians’ knowledge by inviting them to speak during lunch on specific health topics affecting your clients. By having a thorough understanding of these health topics, your outreach staff will provide enhanced education on specific health conditions, recommend health prevention tips, and conduct effective case-management.

3. **Host a Mini Retreat with a Mental Health Counselor**

   As more organizations provide mental health services, organizations can use their internal resources to facilitate mental health education. Outreach staff can take what they have learned from mental health experts and assist with mental health promotion in the field. Ask a mental health professional to facilitate a retreat for outreach staff to teach them about mental health issues, basic coping skills, and treatment referrals. Having an increased understanding of mental health illnesses and how to prevent and/or manage these illnesses can improve health outreach services.

4. **Involve Outreach Staff in Evaluating Program Activities**

   Program evaluation is a key component to every outreach program and requires full participation by everyone on your outreach team. Involve your staff in all facets of program evaluation including:

   - Compiling the data
   - Looking for inconsistencies in the data
   - Looking for patterns in the data

   This helps staff understand the importance of program evaluation in determining final outcomes. Also, fully investing all staff in the evaluation process may mean they will gather data more consistently and effectively.

5. **Involve Outreach Staff in Grant Writing**

   Outreach programs consistently rank "grant writing" as a top programmatic need in HOP’s National Needs Assessment Survey. So why not enlist the help of your outreach staff in grant writing during slow periods? Outreach staff generally possesses the most knowledge about your organization’s outreach program and can have a lot to offer a successful grant application. If outreach staff has limited grant writing experience, ask them to focus on grants less than $10,000, as they are less complicated. To find grant opportunities, check out www.foundationcenter.org.

6. **Invite Outreach Staff to Educate the Community**

   Outreach staff has a wealth of knowledge and information about the community. Have your outreach staff facilitate educational workshops on topics such as patient sensitivity, the role of outreach, and the importance of community engagement for meeting the needs of the underserved. These workshops will strengthen your outreach team’s communication skills while increasing awareness of client needs in your community. Workshop attendees may include: local officials, social service providers, religious groups, and even other departments within your organization.

In conclusion, these skill-building strategies will make the most of slower periods throughout the year at your organization. We encourage you to train and develop your outreach staff as much as possible to enhance program effectiveness.