The “Chat & Chew” Strategy

Making real change requires a collaborative effort involving a broad range of partners. Used effectively, grassroots-focused mobilization strategies are perfect to promote community-building messages to underserved populations. They are also both culturally-relevant and cost effective. The “buy-in” and participation of the grassroots community can be a critical success factor in your efforts, providing positive word-of-mouth.

“Chat & Chews” are MEE’s coined description of small-group information sessions to engage and activate grassroots support, held prior to the launch of a campaign, project or movement. These 60- to 90-minute sessions gather community opinion leaders and engage them, in a safe space, to hear about your work and to air concerns and share potential solutions that meet a particular neighborhood’s needs and interests. By educating and informing opinion leaders about your campaign in a setting where informal, back-and-forth dialogue occurs, they will be more likely to be supportive and more likely to officially “sign on” as advocates on your behalf. A Chat & Chew effort can advance the goals and message of your movement. It will also begin to build broad-based support for elevating your goals to the top of the community's agenda.

Who Should Attend a Chat & Chew?

Community-based Organizations that:
• Have authentic access to and credibility with your movement's target audiences;
• Are addressing some of the many difficult and complex issues that challenge local residents, their families and communities;
• Represent a broad network of local gatekeepers who are “on the frontlines;”
• Are already centers of community life, and who deal on a daily basis with the people you wish to reach and influence;
• Are places where individuals and their families already go for social services, health programs and educational materials; and
• Know the “ins and outs” of the dynamics and key players in their neighborhoods and the local strengths and needs.

Bottom Line: Chat & Chew attendees don't need to be experts on your particular issue. They are experts on what is going on in their neighborhoods. Their broad knowledge about the local landscape can be leveraged in your ongoing community mobilization tactics.

Used effectively, community-mobilization strategies focused at the grassroots level are both cost-effective and culturally relevant. They are a respectful way to promote pro-social and health-related messages to underserved populations, in a way that generates word-of-mouth and creates a sense of community ownership.
Chat & Chew Strategy Overview

Preparing for the Chat & Chew

- Decide on a target area(s) (zip code, Census data, program priorities, etc.)
- Find a community-friendly location to host the session(s)
- Review your existing list of contacts (address book, Rolodex, database)
- Think “outside the box” when considering who to invite
- Develop an invitation that can be mailed, e-mailed and faxed
- Follow-up on invitations with a personal phone call
- Develop a Chat & Chew Presentation Packet containing a set of user-friendly materials (agenda, statistics, postcards, CD/DVD, etc.) that explain what you are doing and why it should be supported

At the Chat & Chew

- Collect contact information for all attendees (sign-in sheet), both for your future use and to share with attendees for their networking purposes
- Ensure that a diversity of voices, ideas and experiences are heard and respected.
- Highlight how your campaign can easily be integrated into other organizations' current priorities and practices.
- Present your campaign as a “win-win” scenario, both for you/your organization and for people in the community
- Be specific about what you need and how people can support you
- Make “the ask,” focusing on the 3D’s: Display, Disseminate, Dialogue
- Officially sign up interested participants as a supporter (form)

Bottom Line: Getting CBO leadership on board may be as simple as providing information about your issue/campaign/movement and inviting them to sign a “support” document. However, even CBOs that understand the need for supporting your work often need simple, time-limited ways to become a partner.

After the Chat & Chew

- Enter contact information for all attendees into a database for follow-up activities
- Serve as a conduit for networking CBOs together so that they can share ideas and resources (value added)