

## Social Marketing as a Spiraling Facet of Program and Systemic Change

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### ***Social marketing is a tool for accomplishing social change.***

Social marketing is an important tool for fostering a critical mass of stakeholder support for efforts to change programs and systems. This form of marketing draws on concepts developed for commercial marketing. But in the context of school and community change, we are not talking about selling products. We are trying to build a consensus for ideas and new approaches that can strengthen youngsters, families, and neighborhoods. Thus, we need to reframe the concept to fit our aim, which is to influence action by key stakeholders.

- To achieve this aim, essential information must be communicated to key stakeholders and strategies must be used to help them understand that the benefits of change will
- The strategies used must be personalized and accessible to the subgroups of stakeholders (e.g., must be "enticing," emphasize that costs are reasonable, and engage them in processes that build consensus and commitment).

From a teaching and learning perspective, the initial phases of social marketing are concerned with creating readiness for change. Substantive change is most likely when high levels of positive energy among stakeholders can be mobilized and appropriately directed over extended periods of time. That is, one of the first concerns related to systemic change is how to mobilize and direct the energy of a critical mass of participants to ensure readiness and commitment. This calls for proceeding in ways that establish and maintain an effective match with the motivation and capabilities of involved parties.

Useful vehicles districts and schools use for social marketing are brochures, websites, email, social media, newsletters, special events and presentations, video, regular stakeholder meetings (e.g., PTA, board, staff), continuing education/professional development sessions, bulletin boards, etc.

**Caution:** Beware of thinking of social marketing as just an event. It is tempting to plan a "big day" to bring people together to inform, share, involve, and celebrate. This can be a good thing if it is planned as one facet of a carefully thought out strategic plan. It can be counterproductive if it is a one-shot activity that drains resources and energy and leads to a belief that "We did our social marketing."

***Because stakeholders and systems are continuously changing, social marketing is an ongoing process.***

## **Some Social Marketing Principles and Practices Relevant for Fostering and Sustaining New Systemic Directions**

- **Understand Critical Differences Among Stakeholders.** Stakeholder agenda differ, so it is essential to understand as much as feasible about the needs and interests of those with whom consensus for proposed new directions is to be developed and sustained.
- **Use and Maintain a Variety of Venues and Means of Communication to Promote Proposed New Directions.** A multifaceted approach is needed to reach, communicate with, and mobilize key segments of stakeholders.
- **Use Straight-forward Language and Graphic Illustrations to Convey Messages.** Messages need to clarify the rationale, basic ideas, and relevant data about societal/group benefits and costs of proposed new directions. And the messages must emphasize why the changes are of greater value than maintaining the status quo or pursuing other alternatives.
- **Provide Opportunities for Interchange and Additional In-depth Communications.** These are designed to build and maintain consensus for proposed new directions among a critical mass of stakeholders and to clarify how changes will be phased-in and underwritten.
- **Involve Champions and First Adopters.** As soon as feasible, identify those who are ready to act and involve them as champions for the changes and as first adopters.
- **Obtain Continuous Evaluative Input About Reactions to Proposed New Directions.** Maintain understanding of how stakeholders are responding and modify social marketing to address negative reactions.
- **Publicize Outcomes and Ongoing Improvements.** As outcome data become available, emphasize findings (if feasible, in cost-benefit terms), and stress continuous improvements in system performance.
- **Institutionalize the New Directions.** Sustainability requires a specific focus on policy makers to ensure new directions are fully enacted into policy and spelled out in regulations and guidelines.
- **Bring New Stakeholders Up-to-Date.** Because key stakeholders leave and others take their place, sustainability often depends on social marketing campaigns that begin to address “newcomers” (e.g., new administrators and staff, new family representatives) as soon as they arrive or advance to a new position.

### **Two Online Examples of Some Social Marketing Tools Related to a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports**

**Brochures from Districts and States** – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/toolkit1a.htm>

**Website Learning Supports System Prototype** – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/lswb.htm>

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**Social Marketing of New Directions for Student & Learning Supports:  
From Enhancing Readiness to Ensuring Sustainability**

*Major Phases of Systemic Change*

		Readiness & Commitment	Initial Implementation	Institutionalization	Ongoing Evolution & Renewal
<i>Interrelated Concerns</i>	Policy Shift				
	Unifying Intervention into a Comprehensive System				
	Reworking Operational Infrastructure				
	Addressing System Change Processes				

**Planning & Implementation**

- 1) Who plans? Who implements?
- 2) What's the message?
- 3) Who's the audience?
- 4) What the best way to communicate with a given audience (e.g., strategic approach - how & when; level of language; different languages; mechanisms/vehicles; resource aids)?
- 5) What is the nature and scope of the message (e.g., general to specific)?
- 6) What are they being asked to do?
- 7) What follow-ups can help meet the objectives?
- 6) How can the impact be evaluated? (e.g., is the message being received; is a critical mass of stakeholders buying in?)

## Action Guide

**With specific respect to developing a *unified and comprehensive system of learning supports*:**

(1) Are you using any of the following social marketing activities to publicize and promote the *new* learning supports system?

- Brochure
- Website -- special section devoted to the new system
- E-mails communicating about the new system
- Newsletters featuring the new system
- Special events and presentations about the new system
- Stakeholder meeting discussions about the new system (e.g., board, PTA, staff)
- Continuing education/professional development sessions related to enhancing the new system
- Bulletin boards featuring the new system
- Social media communications about the new system
- Video featuring the new system
- Local print and broadcast media stories about the new system
- Other (specify)

(2) What are your plans for additional current social marketing activities to publicize and promote the *new* learning supports system over the next 12 months?