



RECRUITMENT

The third component (building block) of community health worker programs is recruitment. Appropriate persons must be selected as community health workers to communicate health messages, in ways that are culturally acceptable, to the intended audience. Once recruitment preparation steps are completed, the recruitment process begins—establishing criteria, identifying possible candidates, contacting and interviewing candidates, and hiring community health workers.

The method for finding and recruiting workers affects their subsequent effectiveness in the community. For example, attempts to professionalize community health workers may damage their existing community relationships and produce tension between community health workers and community members.

Sensitive recruitment strategies not only lead to effective identification and use of community health workers but also guard their reputations in the community once health programs have started.

Preparation Steps

The first step is identifying the scope of work, which depends on the program's goals and objectives. The scope of work and the assessment of resources and needs help in deciding which approach to use. Each program needs to determine the role, specific responsibilities, and activities of community health workers.

Developing a job description provides guidelines for what is expected of community health workers. It determines the specific roles, responsibilities, and associated duties to achieve program goals and objectives. A job description is specific to program needs and resources. Please review the sample job description for a community health worker in appendix A, which begins on page 39.

Recruitment Process

The recruitment process includes four steps: establishing criteria; identifying candidates; contacting, interviewing, and recruiting candidates; and hiring community health workers.

Establishing Criteria. To set criteria, the program needs to determine the qualities, skills, and experience desired in community health workers for the approach selected. Programs should recruit community health workers who match the sociodemographics of the client population. An advisory board and representative community members can help set criteria. The board also can

help in determining the importance of qualities, skills, and experience as well as each area's priority for program needs.

Identifying Candidates. Community health workers have certain qualities as a result of their life experiences. Qualities are innate and cannot be learned. Identifying the qualities needed in community health workers is perhaps most important in the recruitment and hiring process.

Desired qualities of community health workers include

- Commitment to serving the community;
- Caring about others;
- Warmth;
- Respect by peers in the community;
- Shared values and experiences of the people being served;
- Membership in the community being served;
- Good health practices, attitudes, and self-esteem;
- Ability to take a stand for what they believe;
- Ability to grow, change, and learn; and
- Leadership in the community.

Skills are talents that people have learned. Skills can be taught or further enhanced with training.

Community health workers often do not recognize all their own skills or qualities for several reasons.

- They typically have not received payment, training, or recognition for these skills.
- They may know their own abilities but may not think of these qualities as skills.
- So many other health and social services workers regard community health workers as unskilled that they have come to think of themselves as unskilled.

Desired skills of community health workers include

- Good communication (speaking, listening, writing, teaching, being bilingual);
- Being constructive in interpersonal relationships;
- Being friendly, outgoing, sociable, culturally competent, patient, open-minded, and nonjudgmental;
- Knowing about health issues and the health care system;
- Understanding the importance of sharing that knowledge with family and friends;
- Being able to identify and use resources (e.g., having initiative, being self-directed, having the capacity to work independently);
- Facilitating empowerment and leadership skills;
- Resolving conflicts;
- Being respectful; and
- Being honest.

Contacting and Interviewing Candidates. Identifying community health workers can take at least 3 to 6 months. Time invested in recruitment ensures a good match among the community health worker, the community, and job roles and responsibilities. Spending extra time on recruitment can help prevent staff turnover.

A variety of strategies may be used to recruit community health workers:

- Using word of mouth;
- Interviewing other community members to identify “natural helpers”;
- Obtaining ideas from well-established and well-connected community-based organizations to help identify applicants;
- Hiring someone active in the community to form a community advisory health education group to identify candidates;
- Contacting employment offices, local job banks, or social services offices to identify candidates;

- Announcing the new health program in the community (e.g., at presentations; meetings; civic, cultural, and social events);
- Making face-to-face contacts with key people in the community (e.g., ministers, teachers, storekeepers, postmasters, beauticians, barbers, outreach workers employed by other community agencies);
- Consulting previously trained and retired community health workers to identify other potential community health workers;
- Noting the number of times a community member's name appears on the list of solicited names; and
- Planning a community meeting (informal interview party) for all interested or recommended persons.
- Although they are commonly thought of as effective strategies, advertising and using various media (e.g., ads, radio, flyers) are not recommended ways to recruit community health workers who represent the intended audience.

Hiring Community Health Workers. Community involvement is integral to candidate selection and should allow community leaders to suggest candidates through formal or informal methods (e.g., letters of recommendation, personal recommendation) and to help with final selection.

The application and interview process is used to decide whether applicants have the qualities, skills, and experience desired. Candidates for community health worker positions may be discouraged if a resume is requested. Information about qualities, skills, and experience may be obtained by asking candidates to submit a letter. Letters from candidates may include information about their interest in the position, whether they are cancer survivors or have benefited from program-related services, their educational background, and their related work or volunteer experience. Recommendation letters from opinion leaders in the community or local health-related program staff and phone interviews also will help in the selection process.



Using the Action Steps Template

Take a few minutes to think about how using the recruitment suggestions might enhance your community health worker program. List two action steps related to recruitment that you will take on the Action Steps Template on page 33.