

**Step Two****Learn More about the Outreach Community**

When you have found a partnering organization or library, your next step is to define the “target community” that will participate in, and benefit from, your outreach project. This community is likely to be the staff and clients of a community-based organization in your partnership, although you can narrow that definition further. For instance, you may specifically plan an outreach to the diabetes patients and diabetes education staff of a local clinic or to school nurses in your state.

Once you have identified your target outreach community and have an outreach team with representatives from all partnering agencies, the next step is to find the best way to introduce health information resources by conducting a community assessment. Through this learning process, you will add to the demographic information you already have found. You will identify problems and needs that can be addressed through health information outreach, locate intermediaries that can assist with the project, and decide which community members will be most likely to benefit from your team’s work.

Individuals and communities respond to innovations such as online health information resources in fairly consistent ways. Knowing these patterns of behavior change can be of great help to teams planning health information outreach. A great deal of research has been conducted on these patterns, and the theories themselves are discussed at great length in Stage 3 of *Measuring the Difference* [1]. In the next few paragraphs, we present a very brief summary.

**Look for Enthusiastic Community Members:**

- Innovators
- Early Adopters
- Opinion Leaders

As you get to know the people in your outreach community, identify those who are the most enthusiastic about the health information resources you are offering. Research shows that approximately 2.5% of the community will respond first, followed by a second wave of 13.5% [4]. These two groups are called, respectively, innovators and early adopters. Innovators and early adopters often, but not always, are found among staff and volunteers who help community members access health and social service information (such as community health workers, public librarians, or church leaders). They often need more comprehensive and accessible information sources. If you are successful in identifying and training these first users, they may help others in the community get information or influence others to use the health information resources through role-modeling or endorsement of the innovation. Trying to predict the first users in a community can be tricky. Appendix 2 provides some hints that can help you identify the innovators and early adopters in your target community.

You also should identify influential members of your community who can help you gain access to the community. People are more likely to respond to the tools and training you offer through outreach if they are endorsed by people they know and trust. These are sometimes called the opinion leaders [3]. They may or may not be innovators and early adopters, but they usually recognize resources that can build capacity in their community.

***Getting Started with Community-Based Outreach***

Planning and Evaluating Health Information Outreach Projects, Booklet 1  
 Outreach Evaluation Resource Center  
 National Network of Libraries of Medicine, National Library of Medicine, 2006 [reprinted 2008]

If you convince opinion leaders of the importance of your project, they will support the project by endorsing it publicly. They may serve as role models in the adoption of your innovation, but do not be surprised if they are not the first to personally use your innovation.

Researchers also have been able to identify different stages that individuals go through

as they change behavior [5]. These stages of change represent how prepared an individual is to change behavior and, in the case of outreach, start to use a resource. If you can identify participants’ “stage of change,” you can design outreach activities to challenge them to the next level. The table below describes each stage of change and presents suggestions for outreach activities.

**Community Assessment: Stages of Change and Outreach Planning**

Stage	Participant’s behaviors/attitudes related to online health information	Suggested Outreach Activities
Precontemplation	Not thinking of using the Internet to access health information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give demonstrations at club or association meetings</li> <li>• Hold exhibits at health fairs, club meetings, or association meetings</li> </ul>
Contemplation	Thinking about using the Internet for health information access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do presentations at agencies or clinics emphasizing the need for your resource</li> <li>• Participate in community events like health fairs to meet people who have question about your resource</li> </ul>
Preparation	Making plans to learn how to get health information via the Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate computer access</li> <li>• Offer skills training with formats personalized to local need</li> </ul>
Action	Using Internet sources when seeking new information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical support to find superior resources</li> <li>• Publish search tips</li> <li>• Train onsite liaisons to offer support or provide intermediary searches</li> </ul>
Maintenance	Continuing new information-seeking behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer advanced and refresher classes</li> <li>• Continue to partner with opinion leader advocates to reinforce new behaviors</li> </ul>