

Ingredients for Successful Academic-Faith-Based Research Partnerships

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Goals

- Provide overview of our work at the Center of Excellence in Disparities Research
- Provide an example of a faith-based initiative
- Lessons learned from this initiative
- Recommendations for successful research partnerships with faith-based organizations

CEDREC

CEDREC was established in 2009 through an NIMHD P60 with the tripartite mission of research, education, and community engagement.

Research

To expand the capacity for conducting innovative health disparities research at Weill Cornell in cardiovascular disease and Cancer and associated risks.

Education

To train a diverse group of junior investigators who will be able to conduct their own health disparities research and apply for independent NIH funding

Community engagement

To create new collaborations that will inform novel community based programs, accelerate the dissemination of research findings, and build community capacity for change

Community engaged research

Community engagement in research ensures that researchers understand community priorities, promotes culturally-responsive research, and may simultaneously enhance a community's capacity to address its own health needs and health disparities issues

Applies a participatory approach in which community partners are engaged throughout the study

It is bidirectional providing benefits to both parties

Transformative should leave the community with new knowledge or skills beyond funding

Faith-based partnerships

Faith-based organizations are highly sought after partners in research

Churches are trusted institutions

They provide social support, social services, advocacy, access to diverse populations

Potential to reach large population at risk for chronic conditions

Underlying and implicit belief of health and wellness

HeartSmarts

In an effort to increase cardiovascular disease awareness and build research partners we developed HeartSmarts

Faith-based cardiovascular disease prevention initiative developed in partnership with the hospital as a way of disseminating health information to communities at high risk for CV

HeartSmarts

- Faith-based organizations were identified with the help of an established ecumenical group- Brooklyn District public health office advisory group
- Train-the-trainer model to develop lay health ambassadors
- Ambassadors then disseminated information to members of their congregation

Theoretical framework

- Theoretical framework was **Social cognitive theory** which states that learning occurs in a social context
- View health behavior change occurring as a dynamic reciprocal interaction between individuals and their environment
- The church and the **relationships** in the church provided the social environment for health behavior change

Ambassador training

Conducted at the hospital

Participants reimbursed for travel in a 12-week program

Didactics based on CVD educational material from NHBLI, AHA, and role play

Biblical scripture was threaded throughout the training and curriculum. Reviewed and applied scripture to the health messages

Ambassadors involved in selection of scripture and made recommendations for how it should be delivered

Curriculum

Session Number	Examples of scripture	CVD topic
1	“Your Body is a Temple”	Know Your Risk
2	“Your Body is an Instrument of Righteousness”	Act in Time to Heart Attack Signs
3	“Guard Your Heart”	Get Energized and Say YES to Physical Activity
4	“Prosper in All Things and Be in Health”	Control Your Blood Pressure
5	"Eat in Due Season, for Strength"	Keep Your Cholesterol in Check
6	“Present Your Bodies as a Living Sacrifice”	Aim for a Healthy Weight
7	“A Heart at Peace”	Take Good Care of Your Diabetes for Life
8	“Let Us Be Given Vegetables to Eat and Water to Drink”	Healthy Eating Everyday
9	“A Joyful Heart is Good Medicine”	Stress and Depression
10	“I Can Do All Things”	Review and Evaluation

Lessons learned

This is a feasible and acceptable approach to engage churches in health promotion and research

Ambassadors were willing to allow us to collect data and understood the goal will be to refine this program and seek funding

First cohort 18 ambassadors (3 pastors)

Recruited 199 members of their congregation and implemented a tailored curriculum for 12-weeks.

We are analyzing data on outcomes in BP, weight of participants, and ambassadors

Qualitative data

Participants provided qualitative responses

The use of scripture was thought to be both acceptable and relevant.

“HeatSmarts is ideal, and points the way to taking care of our bodies – it is spiritual to backup science.”

“It shows that God is the center of all things even our body/health and if we follow the health rules we will develop healthy bodies which creates a healthy mind.”

“This is an excellent program. It generates an awareness of proper health and nutrition.”

“There is also a spiritual component that makes it even more relevant.”

Qualitative data

“It always reminds me that our body is the temple of the Lord and we have to have it clean so that the Lord can dwell in it, it let me know that a heart of peace gives life to the body.”

“The biblical scripture was very helpful because we were able to read what God’s words say, and comparing it to our daily lives.”

“My overall thoughts about the HSP is that it has made us aware that our bodies are a living holy temple given to us by God, and we must treat it right. Eat right. Exercises.”

“Scriptures are the guidelines to preserving our health and respecting God’s temple in order to have a “sound mind within a sound body.”

Lessons learned

Feasible to conduct a train-the-trainer program with non-health professional members of a church

Feasible to establish an interdenominational program

Feasible and acceptable to integrate scripture into health promotion

Recommendations

Program must align with the philosophy and theology of the organization

Engage other members: not only pastors

(members must be able to demonstrate certificate or funding to the pastor)

Respectful of time: not M-F 9-5

Provide ownership: churches able to take a program and implement it based on their belief

Immediate tangible benefits: hire ambassadors, provide certificates from Weill Cornell, graduation ceremony, a 500₁₅ stipend

Metrics of a successful partnership

Attendance high

Recruit 42 new churches based on recommendations of current ambassadors (wait-list)

Referrals to other organizations (Bowery, NYCHA)

Positive feedback

Willingness to do research and allow data collection

Agreed on the mutual goal of seeking funding