

Grant Outcomes Report

Health Connections To Coverage Campaign: The Push To Enroll New York's Uninsured Children In Medicaid And Child Health Plus

I. Executive Summary

While New York State's insurance coverage policies for children are relatively expansive, many children who are eligible remain without coverage. Under this grant, Spitfire Strategies designed and supported focused enrollment drives to promote the expansion of children's health insurance coverage in New York. Spitfire developed a strategic communications plan, complete with the messages, approaches, and tactics necessary to create a sufficient buzz around enrollment drives in the target communities. As a result, the New York State Department of Health's (NYSDOH's) enrollment drives reached more than 5,000 New Yorkers and resulted in 261 follow-up activities (including referrals to a facilitated enroller, appointments made for application assistance and applications started by families). Their media outreach efforts resulted in 25 media hits about the drives.

This project was part of a larger New York State Health Foundation (NYSHealth) authorization that funded a series of quick-strike analyses to help NYSDOH's Office of Health Insurance Programs (OHIP) find ways to streamline and expand its public health insurance programs. A summary of findings from this authorization is available on NYSHealth's website.

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II. The Problem

New York State is committed to providing all uninsured children and teens access to health insurance coverage. With the help of the federally sponsored State Children's Health Insurance Program, the State covered children up to 250% of the Federal poverty level (FPL). In September 2008, the State expanded children's coverage to 400% of the FPL. The latter expansion in eligibility was completely subsidized by the State because the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) denied New

KEY INFORMATION:

GRANTEE

Spitfire Strategies

GRANT TITLE

Strategic Development and Implementation Support for Children's Coverage Enrollment Drives

DATES

May 2008–February 2009

GRANT AMOUNT

\$102,125

York's application to expand coverage to 400% of the FPL. In June 2009, the CMS approved New York's expansion for children up to 400% of the FPL and granted it \$64 million in new funding. This Federal approval was retroactive to September 2008, when New York State first rolled out the expansion using State-only funding.

While the State's insurance coverage policies for children are relatively expansive, many who are eligible remain without coverage. According to NYSDOH, there were 343,000 uninsured children and teenagers in New York State in 2008. With the expansion of Child Health Plus, approximately 90% of these children were eligible for subsidized coverage through Medicaid and Child Health Plus. OHIP set the goal to inform families about the availability of coverage and to enroll the eligible uninsured children and teenagers. NYSHealth funded Spitfire to complement this goal by developing and implementing strategic enrollment drives across the State.

"New York was really in the right place to re-think its coverage enrollment campaign strategy," says Hollis Calhoun, Senior Associate at Spitfire. "It already had an expansive coverage policy in place. Our job was to help the State come up with the right strategies and messages to educate parents and encourage them to secure health coverage for their children."

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III. Grant Strategy

In May 2008, Spitfire developed and rolled out this campaign with the goals of increasing public awareness about coverage expansion in the State and increasing enrollment numbers in the State's health coverage programs.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This project had four specific objectives:

1. Hold enrollment drives in four cities throughout New York State to increase the number of children enrolled in Medicaid and Child Health Plus
2. Engage community-based organizations to help promote and host the drives
3. Secure media coverage for the drives
4. Demonstrate an increase in enrollment to the governor and legislators to secure continued support for children's health coverage

IV. Grant Activities

Under this grant, Spitfire completed the following activities:

RESEARCH AND PLANNING TO INFORM THE STRATEGIC PLAN AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION. As part of this process, Spitfire wrote a memo that outlined successful partnership models from other states (partnerships between corporate sponsors and community-based organizations), best practices and challenges, and types of media coverage and messaging used in other states' enrollment drives. This scan also made recommendations to the State on potential grocery store partners and regional media markets to target.

CREATION OF A DETAILED STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN THAT INCLUDED ALL OF THE NECESSARY INFORMATION FOR IMPLEMENTING AN ENROLLMENT DRIVE. Building on the research and planning, Spitfire wrote a comprehensive plan that included key audiences to target, recommended messages, appropriate spokespeople, and tactics and timelines to successfully implement the drives.

ENGAGEMENT OF PARTNERS IN REGIONAL MEDIA MARKETS TO IMPLEMENT AND HOLD ENROLLMENT DRIVES. To successfully implement the drives, OHIP facilitated partnerships with the YMCA and Price Chopper grocery stores in Albany and the Wildlife Conservation Society and Children's Museum of Manhattan in New York City. Spitfire brought the Children's Defense Fund-New York on board to facilitate partnerships with Mothers and Babies Perinatal Network of South Central New York in Binghamton, and the Health and Welfare Council of Long Island.

CREATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE MEDIA STRATEGY AS A BACK UP FOR THE PROPOSED STRATEGY. Though this alternative strategy for reaching parents through other methods was not implemented, it was created in the event that OHIP could not implement the enrollment drives as planned.

CREATION OF MEDIA MATERIALS. Spitfire wrote talking points for OHIP's spokespeople, local officials, and family spokespeople. It also wrote media advisories and press releases; media fact sheets about the drives; and a media list that included all key reporters in the target markets.

CREATION OF A TOOLKIT FOR PROMOTING PUBLIC HEALTH INSURANCE OPTIONS TO THE NEWLY UNINSURED. Given the economic downturn, Spitfire developed a communications strategy and toolkit for OHIP to address the growing group of New Yorkers who have lost work and have also likely lost health insurance.

Spitfire attended the drives when possible, and coordinated logistics with partnering organizations to ensure a smooth event. It also assisted local partners with on-site promotion to encourage parents to make an appointment with facilitated enrollers. OHIP took responsibility for the logistics of all of the enrollment drives it conducted.

V. Challenges

Although Spitfire worked with OHIP to plan and implement the first round of enrollment drives, OHIP experienced unforeseen internal changes that inhibited Spitfire's ability to continue working directly on this project. The remainder of the work, therefore, was completed with the assistance of the Children's Defense Fund-New York with Spitfire working in a counseling capacity. The Children's Defense Fund-New York was well positioned to help engage local partners, secure drive locations, host the drives, and conduct promotional activities.

Another unforeseen challenge was the economic downturn the State was facing, which was not as critical of an issue when planning for this project began. Though nothing specifically addressed these challenges during the actual enrollment drives, Spitfire did use some unspent grant funds to investigate and build a toolkit for the State to use in addressing the needs of the newly unemployed, and other New Yorkers struggling because of recent economic concerns.

VI. Key Findings

Spitfire had four objectives at the start of this project. Despite some changes in the workplan during the project time period, Spitfire was able to meet three of four of those objectives:

1. HOLD ENROLLMENT DRIVES IN FOUR CITIES THROUGHOUT NEW YORK STATE TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN MEDICAID AND CHILD HEALTH PLUS.

Spitfire helped to plan and support 15 enrollment drives in five cities across New York State:

- Albany and Troy
 - Price Chopper Grocery Stores (five locations)
 - YMCA (four locations)
- Binghamton
 - Oakdale Mall
- Long Island (Centereach, NY)
 - Middle Country Public Library
- New York City
 - Children's Museum of Manhattan (two separate events)
 - Bronx Zoo
 - New York Aquarium

2. ENGAGE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS TO HELP PROMOTE AND HOST THE DRIVES.

Spitfire provided recommendations and helped to identify and provide tools to engage corporate partners and community-based organizations to promote and host the enrollment drives in all four

cities. Working with local organizations provided access to and knowledge of the communities that were critical to informing the public about the drives. As mentioned earlier, Spitfire brought the Children's Defense Fund-New York on board with the project to help in securing these local partners.

3. SECURE MEDIA COVERAGE FOR THE DRIVES.

Spitfire implemented a thorough media outreach strategy to promote the enrollment drives and, when possible, secured local media coverage in radio, television, and newspaper outlets. It created location-specific media materials for each of the drives based on back-to-school and holiday messaging, depending on the timing of the drive. In addition to writing press releases, media advisories, and pitch e-mails, Spitfire created media lists for each market that included almost 400 reporter contacts across various media formats and markets. NYSDOH's public affairs group also helped to promote the enrollment drives.

Spitfire encouraged OHIP and the Children's Defense Fund-New York to identify local spokespeople who would be willing to talk to the media about the expanding Child Health Plus program and/or the enrollment drives. Spitfire helped to prepare these spokespersons with talking points and general interview preparation.

The media outreach resulted in 25 media hits specifically about the drives. These hits included feature stories on local television stations before the drives took place in Binghamton and Albany. The outreach also resulted in television and newspaper coverage on the day of the events in Binghamton, Albany, Long Island, and New York City. Some of the media outlets covering the drives included:

- Fox affiliate WICZ-TV (Binghamton)
- *Times Union* (Albany)
- Buzz 105.7 (Albany)
- Telemundo
- KISS-FM (New York City)
- Clear Channel affiliates (Binghamton)



In addition to traditional media outreach, Spitfire also created fliers for local partners to use in their outreach. Local partners blanketed their communities with these fliers.

“In total, the enrollment drives reached more than 5,000 New Yorkers and resulted in 278 follow-up activities (including referrals to facilitated enrollers, appointments scheduled for application assistance, and/or to begin an application).”

4. DEMONSTRATE AN INCREASE IN ENROLLMENT TO THE GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATORS TO SECURE CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN'S HEALTH COVERAGE.

In total, the enrollment drives reached more than 5,000 New Yorkers and resulted in 278 follow-up activities (including referrals to facilitated enrollers, appointments scheduled for application assistance, and/or to begin an application). OHIP staff members literally counted the number of people in attendance at each event using sign-in sheets and counting devices. It is impossible to determine the impact of these enrollment drives on Medicaid coverage; however current Population Survey estimates show a 1.8% decline in the number of uninsured children and a 2.9% increase in children's Medicaid and other public program coverage.¹ OHIP also estimates that enrollment grew by 50,000 children during 2008. “Children's enrollment in New York's Medicaid/CHPlus programs increased consistently throughout 2008, following some of the simplifications we implemented to the eligibility and enrollment process, as well as the Child Health Plus expansion,” said Judith Arnold, Director, Division of Coverage and Enrollment at OHIP. “We believe that these policies in combination with public awareness campaigns have contributed to this increase in enrollment. With the decline in the economy, enrollment continued to grow despite the fact that we cannot do as much as we'd like to in terms of marketing the programs.” In addition, officials at OHIP believe that families who received materials at an event later followed up with facilitated enrollers; some families who saw an advertisement for an enrollment drive, but were unable to attend, called the State's hotline and got a referral for a facilitated enroller.

While some parents had heard of Medicaid and Child Health Plus, few who were reached through the enrollment drives were aware of the expansion. The enrollment drives also helped the local partners to expand their reach and provide additional health services and information.

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¹ The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, “Health Coverage & Uninsured,” Kaiser State Health Facts website, <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/profileind.jsp?ind=174&cat=3&rgn=34>, accessed October 2009.

VII. Lessons Learned

In its memo on other enrollment drive efforts, Spitfire outlined some of the best practices and challenges related to these projects. Best practices included:

- When seeking out corporate partners, engage well known or powerful contacts to help broker contact with potential partners.
- Provide recognition to corporate partners and highlight their efforts in communication materials and all media contact.
- Local grassroots outreach and advocacy groups have their “ears to the ground” and are well connected to the local community. Securing their buy-in and support is critical to successfully running a drive.
- Go after local media—especially radio—to promote the drives. Such coverage helps with the turnout at enrollment drives, especially in underrepresented communities.
- Use enrollment drives as an opportunity to collect a story database. Volunteers will be interacting directly with the people who have been affected by health coverage issues. Their stories are compelling, and many are willing to share them publicly. Be sure to get their permission to use their stories in future media efforts.
- Persistence is necessary when contacting a corporation to establish a partnership.
- When dealing with multiple business partners, the coordinating organization must be sensitive and keep each partner informed of the others’ activities in order to avoid conflicts of interest or competition. This is especially true when the partners are in the same industry.

Regarding the sustained success of enrollment drives, Calhoun comments that “even the best strategy development can’t be successful without a system in place to embrace these strategies and platforms and keep the momentum going.” Essentially, the message must be delivered repeatedly to effectively reach the target audiences; it cannot just be a one-time effort.

Another lesson from the philanthropic perspective that the Foundation has learned from similar work is that media campaigns and enrollment drives work well to increase enrollments and renewals in public health insurance programs, but their success is



limited to the time period of the campaign itself. This issue emerged under an NYSHealth-sponsored campaign run by Public Health Solutions to increase awareness among Chinese non-English speaking Medicaid beneficiaries about re-enrollment. The rate of renewal applications began to decline soon after the end of the grant period. This enrollment drive was certainly effective in reaching people, but should be done on an ongoing basis to result in a consistent increase in enrollments.

VIII. The Future

NYSHealth granted a no-cost extension on this grant, which allowed Spitfire to use unexpended funds to provide guidance on how to most effectively reach New Yorkers who became unemployed as a result of the economic downturn that started in 2008. Many families affected by the downturn were unaware that they or their children were eligible for health coverage through Child Health Plus, Family Health Plus, or Medicaid. Toward the end of its grant period, Spitfire conducted informal research to determine how to best reach this audience, and provided a toolkit tailored with messages to use to reach this new audience.

Using the information in this toolkit, OHIP staff members began working with the Department of Labor and joined them when conducting sessions at companies laying off workers. Both the idea to work with the Department of Labor and the messages used during these sessions came from Spitfire's toolkit.

OHIP now has teams out in the community establishing community partnerships with facilitated enrollment agencies in addition to doing outreach. Unfortunately, because of the downturn in the economy and resulting cutbacks at the Department of Health, it is unable to do any paid television or radio advertising. However, OHIP continues to use the messages developed by Spitfire to create and distribute written marketing materials. "We continue to pull out key phrases from Spitfire's work," said Anne Marie Costello of OHIP. "We learned a lot about creating the right messages to draw people in and get them interested in enrolling in our health insurance programs. We continue to pull from these messages to develop marketing materials."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

ABOUT THE GRANTEE

Spitfire Strategies is a strategic communications firm dedicated to helping foundations and nonprofits develop and run highly tailored communications efforts to support their goals and realize their missions. Spitfire designs campaigns and initiatives, and provides strategic communications solutions to promote positive social change. Spitfire provides high-quality strategic campaign planning, communications counseling and tailored, cost-effective implementation to nonprofits and foundations working to promote issues in the public interest. Spitfire also provides capacity-building trainings to increase organizations' overall effectiveness.

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