

Workshop Three

Communicating with Policymakers about Population and Health

Population and health researchers, managers, and practitioners are deeply concerned about government policies, programs, and resource-allocation decisions that affect population and health services and their clients. These professionals often have extensive knowledge of demographic surveys, censuses, and other studies plus long experience with programs and familiarity with user needs that should play a key role in guiding policy decisions. Yet all too often, their research findings, knowledge, and experience fail to reach influential audiences and, consequently, are not used to shape policies and programs.

This communication gap arises for a number of reasons. In some cases, population and health professionals may be unfamiliar with the policy process and the information needs of policymakers. In other cases, they may fail to see the policy relevance of their own knowledge and experience. As a result, they do not make the extra effort to communicate in nontechnical language to policymakers or to shape messages specifically for policy audiences.

In 2008, the East-West Center will bring together a team of coordinators and resource persons from five of the leading organizations working to improve communication among population and health researchers, practitioners, program managers, and policymakers. Participants will benefit from the combined knowledge and experience of the East-West Center, the MEASURE DHS (Demographic and Health Surveys) project, Management Sciences for Health (MSH), the Guttmacher Institute, and the Center for Communication Programs at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHU/CCP).

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVE

The objective of this workshop is to increase the use of research findings and professional knowledge and experience to improve population and health policies and programs. Sessions are designed to help participants identify the policy implications of population and health research, to understand how research findings and professional knowledge can influence the policy process, and to communicate with policymakers in simple and compelling formats. Specifically, participants will:

- Explore the policy process and successful strategies for policy change
- Design strategies to communicate research findings to policymakers
- Develop hands-on skills for communicating with policymakers, both directly and through the media

Each participant will make a series of oral presentations and written summaries in appropriate formats for policy audiences. They will learn how to use computer-graphics software to enhance their oral and written presentation skills.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

The workshop is designed for researchers, program managers, and other professionals working in population and health. Participants should have computer experience and be fluent in English. They should bring their own research results or project data that can be used to address a policy problem. They should also be familiar with the most

recent Demographic and Health Survey or equivalent national survey from their home country.

■ **Workshop Sessions**

Plenary and small-group sessions, incorporating a hands-on, participatory approach, will cover five areas:

■ *Exploring the policy process*

Participants will examine the factors that influence the policy process, the differing roles of policymakers and population and health professionals, and the barriers that limit the use of research findings and project experience in policymaking. Reading materials, lectures, and discussions will generate ideas on how to influence the policy process.

■ *Designing strategies to communicate research findings to policymakers*

Participants will analyze the policy context of their own research and will develop communication strategies that include identification of policy goals, primary and secondary audiences, key objectives, clear and compelling messages, and appropriate channels and formats. Discussion will cover how to recognize communication opportunities, build a policy coalition, and design and carry out an action plan.

■ *Communicating research results through the media*

A comprehensive policy-communication strategy requires an understanding of how to work effectively with journalists. Participants will learn how to communicate to policymakers through newspapers, radio, and television. Skill-building exercises will include drafting a press release, practicing interview techniques, and learning how to build and maintain good relationships with the media.

■ *Writing fact sheets and policy memoranda and conducting policy briefings*

Program information and research results must be presented in concise formats that policymakers can absorb quickly. Participants will prepare fact sheets based on current data from their home countries and policy memoranda based on a case study. In role-play exercises, they will conduct policy briefings for high-level government officials.

■ *Making oral presentations*

Participants will learn how to make presentations with computer graphics using PowerPoint. Workshop sessions will introduce a step-by-step approach to organizing effective policy presentations and will provide design tips for presenting text, graphs, flowcharts, and photos. Each participant will prepare a 10-minute oral presentation of research results or project information for a policy audience. These presentations will be videotaped and critiqued.

■ **Coordinators**

Sidney B. Westley (B.A. Smith College) is a Communications Specialist with the Research Program at the East-West Center. Ms. Westley has worked as a writer, editor, and communications director for international research organizations in Ethiopia, Kenya, and the United States. She has taught courses in science writing for researchers and in science reporting for journalists.

Phyllis Tilson Piotrow (Ph.D. Johns Hopkins University) was the founder and first Director of JHU/CCP. Earlier, she served as the first Executive Director of the Population Crisis Committee, now Population Action International. She is the author of *Health communication: Les-*

sons from family planning and reproductive health (1997) and *Advancing health communication: The PCS experience in the field* (2003).

Laurie Liskin (Sc.M. Johns Hopkins University) is the Senior Advisor for Communication with the MEASURE DHS project at Macro International. Over the past 30 years, she has prepared national communication strategies, conducted needs assessments, helped develop monitoring and evaluation plans and survey instruments, conducted and analyzed qualitative research, and disseminated HIV/AIDS and family planning information.

■ **Resource Persons**

Lourdes De la Peza (Innovación Educativa, Universidad Iberoamericana) is a Senior Program Associate with Management Sciences for Health (MSH). She has worked for the past 20 years with public- and private-sector organizations in health and other fields, primarily in Latin America and the Caribbean. Her work focuses on organizational and management development, quality improvement, leadership, and executive coaching.

Gustavo L. Suarez (B.A. State University of New York/New Paltz) is Communications Director at the Guttmacher Institute. He has worked for 18 years in communications, media relations, and public affairs. Before joining Guttmacher, he served with the U.S. Foreign Service in Delhi, Tel Aviv, Rome, Washington, D.C., and New York. He then served as Communications Director for the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and Managing Director of Media Relations for Planned Parenthood Federation of America.