

ADVOCACY WITH FAMILY PLANNING CHAMPIONS

What Is It?

Engaging with individuals who believe in the values and benefits of family planning to actively support and promote family planning to others and help create a supportive family planning policy and social environment.

Family planning champions can include:

National and county leaders

- Religious leaders
- Opinion leaders
- Community health workers
- Health care service providers
- Satisfied contraceptive method users

They can be found in different sectors of the community and can play a variety of roles in advocating and promoting family planning. Their expertise, contacts, position of authority and social recognition and acceptance can help influence perceptions, attitudes and decisions, helping to support family planning programs.

Using these techniques, these identified champions can sensitize others on family planning and encourage them to become champions as well. This can help add to the pool of champions, and can further advance family planning programs at the community level.

What are the Benefits?

- Builds broad-based support across communities, including among religious, political and other leaders
- Adds credibility to family planning advocacy activities, as champions are positive voices from within the community
- Helps advocate for positive policies and needed infrastructure that family planning programs require
- Dispels myths and misperceptions about family planning services; as trendsetters and initiators of change, champions can speak positively to their communities about the importance of family planning

How to Implement?

Step 1: Identify and select champions

Consider the following attributes in champions:

- Self-motivation
- Eagerness to actively participate in family planning activities
- Recognition and respect among peers and community members as an opinion leader
- Good public speaking abilities

- Ability and willingness to clearly articulate the values of family planning

You can use different methods to identify potential champions:

- The Net-Map method can help identify potential stakeholders, champions and challenges, as was used in Nigeria at the national and local levels to help guide their advocacy work.
- A “snowball” approach, in which you identify the first champions, for example by using some of the information in the Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative’s key informant interview questionnaire and the Family Planning Effort Index. These champions can then help identify other potential champions, and so forth.

Step 2: Train champions on family planning and advocacy topics

Different groups of champions may require specialized training. For example:

- **Community health workers** may need training on how to provide family planning to their clients, so they are better prepared to champion family planning in their work and with their communities. A [training package for community health workers](#) developed by the Tupange project in Kenya, can be used as a guide.
- Religious, community and political leaders may benefit from an orientation event to better prepare them to talk about family planning at the national, community and individual levels. In Kenya, the Tupange project developed a one-day orientation for religious leaders. The Urban Reproductive Health Initiative in Senegal also engaged religious leaders, and developed targeted messages with which they could promote family planning among their peers. This can be a key way to recruit additional family planning champions. More information on this approach can be found [here](#). The orientation can include a range of materials depending on the champions’ needs. Examples include:
 - Tupange’s [Myth and Misconceptions Booklet](#) and a presentation on [Myths and Misconceptions](#) can be adapted for your setting.
 - [RAPID](#) tools can be created to stimulate dialogue and present basic information about family planning needs in your community.
 - The Population Reference Bureau’s [ENGAGE presentations](#) offer 1-3 minute introductions on a range of topics, which can be incorporated into the training.
 - [Family Planning Advocacy Through Religious Leaders](#) can provide further guidance.

Working with Religious Leaders

Consider holding an interfaith forum with religious leaders of different faiths. In Nigeria, interfaith forums between Muslims and Christians were established in several cities. They met each year, and worked closely with the Advocacy Working Group in the community to enhance family planning programming. Partners in Nigeria used a handbook to encourage religious leaders to speak openly about family planning in their communities. You can also think about holding training-of-trainer events. In Senegal, the Urban Reproductive Health Initiative worked with religious leaders to train other community-based religious mediators and health educators to promote the benefits of family planning.

Step 3: Develop an action plan for implementation purposes

- As you develop your strategy with the [Advocacy Working Group](#), include activities geared toward family planning champions such as community events or orientation meetings.
- Convene a series of meetings to address community concerns and provide additional training. You can start broadly by meeting with your group of identified champions. Then, narrow your focus once you identify additional groups to target.
- For example, in Nigeria, the Advocacy Working Group first held a one-day meeting with champions to discuss family planning and its link to development. The working group then asked the champions for their suggestions for other community groups to visit, and the working group conducted one-day training sessions for these other groups to spread correct information about family planning. During the training, they held question and answer sessions and taught group members to discuss family planning with their community.

Step 4: Develop a reward or recognition plan for the champions

- Put in place cost-effective, sustainable rewards to motivate champions to continue volunteering their time. Depending on your budget, this could include tablets, cameras, flash drives, or other items to help with their work as champions. You could also provide nicely printed information packages with targeted messages and tips on how to deliver those messages to their communities.
- Recognize family planning champions during various forums at the community level such as World AIDS Day, World Contraception Day, or International Women's Day.
- Include active champions in various national and international meetings and trainings. You may invite them to deliver a keynote address or to participate in a discussion forum.

Step 5: Follow-up and monitor advocacy efforts

- Maintain and manage a list of identified champions in your community (executive, political leaders, administrators and religious leaders).
- Track capacity-building efforts among champions on family planning and provision of messages.
- After you develop an action plan, hold routine meetings with champions to monitor progress and track their relevant activities.
- Track the number of events (community events, religious meetings, etc.) in which family planning messages were included.

Keep in Mind

- Keep in mind the following costs of working with family planning champions:
 - Training and orientation of family planning champions at different levels
 - Provision of information packages and promotional materials to champions
 - Follow-up meetings with the selected champions
 - Prizes and incentives, as needed
- Busy decision-makers are often influenced by those around them, such as their assistants or deputies. Build relationships with these people.

What is the Evidence?

Evidence has shown that engaging champions from a broad range of backgrounds and sectors can help advocacy efforts.

- In Kenya, champions helped ensure that family planning was incorporated into the annual work plans for the county and sub-county levels. They also helped spread news about government family planning policies throughout the community.
- Also in Kenya, champions worked with Muslim women leaders to dispel myths about family planning and with imams to teach their congregations about the importance of family planning. The champions also helped by organizing forums at religious congregations and by using churches to host family planning outreach camps.
- In Senegal, the Urban Reproductive Health Initiative worked with religious leaders to train community-based religious mediators and health educators to promote the benefits of family planning. These advocates [visited more than 14,000 households](#) and met with over 21,000 women and men.

The Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative [trained approximately 680 community-based champions](#) to build support for family planning by addressing health concerns and fear of side effects.

Helpful Tips

- Target messages differently for each community group. Religious leaders may need more information about myths and misconceptions, while community health workers may need more technical information.
- Champions come from diverse backgrounds and are meant to help the program achieve advocacy results at different levels. Having a clear advocacy strategy is essential to identify what kinds of champions will be most valuable and will likely contribute most to the advocacy objectives.
- Family planning clients can be important champions. When they share their positive experiences as users of family planning, they instill confidence in potential clients and can help nudge those who are undecided into becoming acceptors of family planning.

Challenges

- Champions often have regular jobs or other responsibilities and thus may not always have your family planning objectives in mind. To ensure they become active family planning champions, you will need to orient and train them on family planning advocacy.
- You may find that some champions do not participate regularly. Maintain a follow-up mechanism to replace any champions who are inactive and to motivate those who are active.
- Religious leaders from different faiths may have different views on which contraceptive methods to support. Holding advocacy forums can help ensure that religious leaders reach consensus and find a common voice.

Tools Related to This Approach

- [East Africa: Community Health Worker Family Planning Training Package](#)
- [East Africa: Myths and Misconceptions](#)
- [East Africa: Myths and Misconceptions Presentation](#)
- [Key Informant Interview Questionnaire](#)
- [Nigeria: Net Mapping Exercise](#)
- [Nigeria: RAPID Tools](#)

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