

“Long-term success means building partnerships.”

(Alberta Frost, Director, Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation. Conference Highlights, February 24-26, 2003, p. 29 www.fns.usda.gov/nutritionconference)

The Kansas Nutrition Network (KNN) has as its mission to develop and expand partnerships which provide nutrition and physical activity education, and improve access to nutrition resources and nutrition and physical activity education to improve the health of low income Kansans. KNN accomplishes this through a variety of methods, including bi-monthly partner meetings, monthly email newsletters, a web page, and coordinating the State Nutrition Action Plan (SNAP). See www.kansasnutritionnetwork.org.

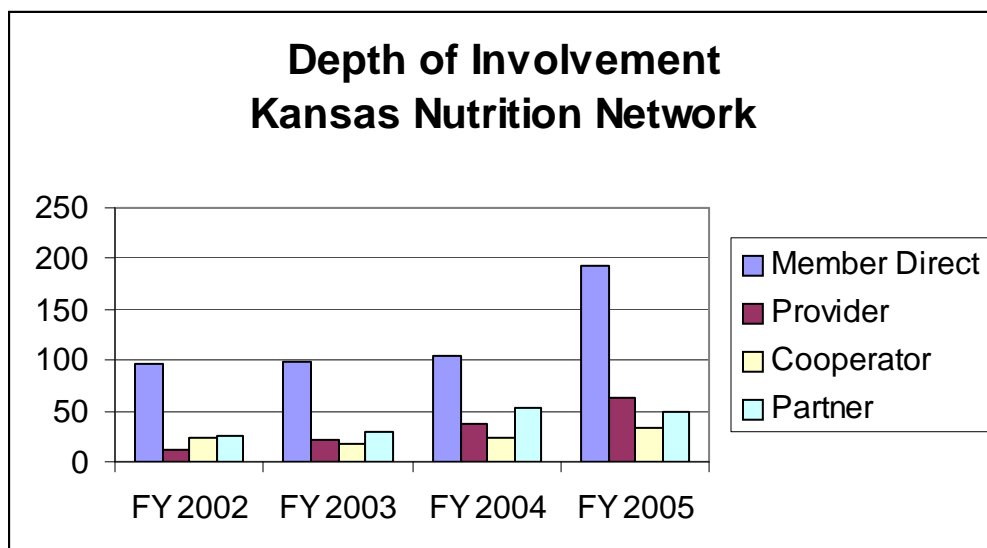
The KNN email newsletter provides information on issues affecting persons in poverty and current nutrition issues such as overweight and obesity. To evaluate the usefulness of the email newsletter and web page, KNN conducted an email survey during April 2005. Almost 20% of the email recipients responded to the survey. Of those, 100% reported that they always or frequently read the newsletter each month; 71% reported that they always or frequently access/click on the available links; 82% reported always or frequently finding the newsletter helpful. Of those respondents, 47% reported always or frequently accessing the KNN website; 65% reported that the KNN partner links are useful; and 71% reported that the website is always or frequently useful or helpful.

KNN tracks contacts through the KNN monthly email newsletter. The KNN newsletter reached 1,164 individuals and organizations (up from 924 during FY 2004) and the website had 1,461 hits during FY 2005.

To evaluate the effectiveness of KNN, each KNN partner completes a Depth of Partnership form during KNN meetings. A **member** attends meetings and participates in on-going dialog and information sharing. A **provider** shares brochures, handouts, or other materials from their own organization. A **cooperator** assists with the outreach of other KNN organizations, such as distributing brochures of other organizations, or putting information about other organizations in newsletters. A **partnership** is a collaboration to create something new, such as a joint grant proposal or a joint project.

The number, type, depth, and strength of partnerships involved in the social marketing of nutrition education efforts can be important indicators of change. The greater the number and variety of community partnerships and the deeper the collaborations among these partners, the greater will be the exposure of the target audiences to social marketing messages and affordable and nutritious food (*J Nut Ed* 33 supp 1: S8-S9, 2001).

As can be seen from the graph, the number and depth of the partnerships has been increasing since this tool was first utilized in FY 2002, thus increasing the possible exposure of the target audience to nutrition education messages.



Each of the “reports” on the Depth of Partnership graph has a “story.” A few highlights during FY 2005:

- KNN partnered with the Early Childhood Action Team (ECAT) to coordinate a General Mills Champion Grant and a grant from the Kansas Health Foundation to provide nutrition and physical activity training to child care staff and materials to 1,800 children in child care, Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Material was expanded to include toddler-appropriate food and physical activity messages to parents. Parent materials were translated into Spanish, and both English and Spanish parent materials were put on the KNN website. KNN submitted a nomination for a LINC award, “The Early Childhood Action Team is Berry Berry Good!” although we did not receive this award.
- KNN partnered with the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) to develop the Power Panther Preschool Program. This program provides additional nutrition and physical activity materials to child care providers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs as an extension of Berry Berry Good. KNN will be assisting with the training for this project during FY 2006.
- KNN began partnering with local communities to implement the Pick a better snack campaign. Local Extension offices, health departments, Head Start programs and others began using the materials.
- KNN partners assisted with promoting the use of EBT for purchasing Heartland SHARE food boxes. During FY 2005, \$87,066.08 of food stamp dollars were used to purchase Heartland SHARES.

A second means to evaluate the strength of KNN’s partnerships is through the use of self-assessments. During FY 2004, this was completed using the Partnership Self-Assessment Tool, a reliable web-based tool that assesses how well the collaborative process is working. The tool is provided at no charge by the Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool assesses the success of a partnership's collaborative process by measuring the level of synergy. Synergy is a key indicator of a successful collaborative process because it reflects **the extent to which the partnership can do more than any of its individual participants.** Put another way, a partnership's level of synergy indicates the extent to which the partnership, as a whole, is greater than the sum of its parts (Partnership Self-Assessment Tool, Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health, p. 4 www.partnershiptool.net).

The Early Childhood Action Team (ECAT) is a working group of KNN, a collaboration of agencies and individuals working on children's health and wellness issues. The members of ECAT completed a self-assessment of the team, and the findings were reported on 09/09/04. **The overall synergy score was 4.4 out of a possible score of 5, which reflects the extent to which the participants are accomplishing more together than they can on their own.**

During 2001-2002, KNN contracted with Best Start Social Marketing to conduct interviews of KNN partner agencies to ascertain attitudes regarding KNN's mission, relative success at fulfilling that mission, and how to improve efforts to better serve the partner agencies.

What stands out in this series of interviews is the overwhelming positive experiences that partner representatives share regarding their participation in KNN. While ideas and recommendations for future direction of the organization are offered, there are no negative findings in the data, nor negative comments found among interviews. This is highly unusual in studies of partnership and stakeholder relations that Best Start has previously conducted. Partner representatives perceive KNN as an organization that is functioning at a high level in terms of meeting the partner organization's needs, achieving organizational goals, and effectively supporting interaction among partner organizations. (Kansas Nutrition Network Partner Interviews, Best Start Social Marketing, March 2002, p 3)

KNN is all about building partnerships. To more effectively provide nutrition education and improve access to nutrition resources, including food stamps, to low income Kansans, KNN works to build and sustain partnerships. KNN has consistently shown growth in developing and supporting partnerships, and KNN partners report that they perceive KNN as functioning at a high level in supporting partner agencies. KNN helps agencies achieve more by working together through KNN than they can by working independently to improve the health of low income Kansans.