

Carolina Teen Health Website Benefits from Stakeholder Collaboration

South Carolina is 11th highest in the nation in teen births. In an effort to prevent too-early childbearing, a variety of stakeholders worked together to create a targeted website called Carolina Teen Health.

The nearly 20-year-old South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a statewide nonprofit organization whose mission is to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy. Since 2007, the SC Campaign has focused on reaching young people with pregnancy prevention messages online and through social media. In 2010, the SC Campaign started a yearlong process to develop the targeted website [Carolina Teen Health](#)¹ with funding from the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC). The site is interactive, designed to meet teens where they are with the information they need, taking into account their likes, dislikes, and the way they process information online.

Also in 2010, the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) brought together six state teams for the Preconception Health and Adolescents Action Learning Collaborative. Over an 18-month period, teams learned collectively, analyzed problems around preconception health, and strategized effective ways to incorporate and improve preconception health messages for adolescents. The South Carolina learning collaborative team quickly settled on the Internet as the best way to reach teens.

The timing of the two projects was serendipitous. Since the SC Campaign was already well on its way to launching a youth website, the South Carolina learning collaborative team decided to develop preconception health content for the SC Campaign site, blending its financial and expert resources with the SC Campaign's to maximize Carolina Teen Health's effectiveness.

Steps Taken: Collaboration

- Learning collaborative meetings took place over 18 months. The South Carolina team included representatives from SC DHEC, the South Carolina Department of Education, and the SC Campaign.
- The learning collaborative's design allowed a small group of professionals to meet off-site, learn together, develop professionally, and concentrate on preconception health. The design also ensured no single person had to own the outcome or lead the process, enabling participants to commit to collaborating toward a shared goal.
- Given the group's time and funding constraints, group consensus focused on developing a preconception health website to reach adolescents as the most effective strategy.

- 17 South Carolina teens aged 15-19 give birth every day.
- The Carolina Teen Health website provides information teens need to seek healthcare and contraception and has the potential to reach thousands in a cost-effective, culturally relevant manner.

¹ Since this article was written, the SC Campaign has launched a new and improved version of Carolina Teen Health. The new website address is www.notrightnowsc.org.

- The group also considered a website’s downside: resources needed for development and maintenance. One of the learning collaborative’s members, who worked for the SC Campaign, discussed the possibility of collaborating. Both the SC Campaign and the learning collaborative recognized the opportunity. The learning collaborative benefitted from the SC Campaign’s web development and maintenance resources, and the SC Campaign benefited from additional website content about preconception health and additional promotional resources.
- The learning collaborative, with technical assistance from AMCHP and ASTHO, developed preconception health content to make Carolina Teen Health more robust and comprehensive.
- A small portion of the learning collaborative’s grant and some of AMCHP and ASTHO’s technical assistance went toward marketing the website, enhancing its overall effectiveness. For instance, the learning collaborative paid to design and print advertisements for the site: palm cards with QR codes that linked users to Carolina Teen Health (see Figure 1).
- The management and funders of each project were excited by the prospect of collaborating and building on existing resources.



Figure 1: Carolina Teen Health promotional palm card.

Steps Taken: Website Design

- The SC Campaign relied on young people in the creation of Carolina Teen Health. Volunteer adolescent advisors made it clear that they wanted their own site. Teens wanted reliable online sources of information on pregnancy prevention and sexual health that were unattached to sites for adults.
- Three marketing focus groups—27 adolescents, in total—advised the creative team over several months. Participants indicated that the site should be eye-catching, dynamic, bold, and colorful; that messages should emphasize the present, not the future; and that they wanted to hear from teens who look and talk like them.
- The learning collaborative included content in the [“Know Your Plan/Plan a Healthy Life”](#) section of Carolina Teen Health, which includes information on healthy living practices such as being active, eating well, and staying smoke-free. The section also links to other organizations teens can visit for more resources.
- Once the SC Campaign finalized its plans for the site, it took about a year to build. The group hired a webmaster to construct the site’s architecture and relied on SC Campaign staff, writers, outside partners, and teens to add content.
- The site includes a clinic locator tool, where users enter their ZIP code and pull up a list of nearby clinics, including driving directions, the type of clinic, if they offer free condoms, whether you can text questions, and other contact information. SC DHEC funded this tool’s creation to make their clinics more accessible, especially to young clients, who may not be familiar or comfortable with accessing their own healthcare services. Giving teens access to this tool was a major reason the SC Campaign developed Carolina Teen Health.

- One of SC DHEC's main goals is to increase the number of sexually active women who access contraceptives. To make accurate information more accessible for young people, the agency funded the creation of a contraceptive comparison tool within Carolina Teen Health that differentiates methods by cost, effectiveness, pros and cons, and how to access the method.
- Carolina Teen Health launched in January 2011.

Results: Collaboration

- There was significant crossover between staff and organizations represented on both projects, enabling a free flow of information and first-hand knowledge of each other's projects in meetings.
- When the project shifted from planning to website development, no one felt a loss of ownership. Participants were committed to the collaboration and recognized the benefits of partnering.
- The learning collaborative's small setting built personal relationships among participants, which made collaboration in other settings more natural. These relationships also fostered commitment to the end goal; though preconception health was outside the scope of all participants' "day jobs," they wanted to see the project through.
- The group remained patient with each other and the process, though activity sometimes stalled as participants' other professional commitments took precedence.
- Integrating the learning collaborative's smaller project into the SC Campaign's larger one made it sustainable.
- Two years after the learning collaborative completed its work, the preconception health information is still accessible on Carolina Teen Health and regularly updated by the SC Campaign.
- The SC Campaign widely promotes Carolina Teen Health to direct-service professionals, in hopes that they will become ambassadors for the site and use it with young people.

- South Carolina's teen birth rate declined 28 percent between 2001 and 2011. In a single year—between 2010 and 2011—the teen birth rate dropped 8 percent.
- The greatest success has been among younger teens, age 15 to 17, whose birth rates fell 39 percent.
- Among 18 and 19 year olds, birth rates fell 22 percent.
- 3 in 4 teen births are to a mother who is 18 or 19 years old.

Results: Website

- Carolina Teen Health is unique because it is locally based and developed, with specific information for South Carolina teens (e.g., clinic locator). Young people from the community are featured on the site and regularly write content and blog posts.
- Much of the website's content is relevant for teens outside South Carolina as well, given that very few—if any—sites like it exist. National sites such as [Stay Teen](#) and [Bedsider](#) do not contain state-specific information, and Bedsider is geared toward a decidedly older crowd.
- Today, the SC Campaign has several grants funding a portion of Carolina Teen Health's maintenance costs. The maintenance includes continually adding new content—sections for LGBTQ youth and 18- and 19-year-olds recently went live—to keep young people engaged.

- Social media is a large part of maintaining the site's freshness and relevance with its target audience. The SC Campaign develops a monthly social media plan for its Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr feeds, which are updated three times per day, sometimes by teens themselves. The social media sites engage young people with interesting facts, funny images, and relevant information and drive traffic to the main website.
- Carolina Teen Health had 15,890 page views and 6,000 unique visitors between July 2012 and July 2013. The majority of the visitors are located in South Carolina, but the site has been viewed from all 50 states and 98 other countries.

Lessons Learned: Collaboration

- Carolina Teen Health is a great example of a single product meeting multiple goals. The learning collaborative developed and integrated information on preconception health that would not otherwise have been available on the site. Because the content appeared on a larger, more visible website, funders got more bang for the buck.
- The reason the learning collaborative was successful, says Shannon Flynn, director of research and evaluation at the SC Campaign and a member of the learning collaborative, was that the group's agreed-upon communications strategy focused on the end result. Their collaboration process was also part of their success. By getting away from their day-to-day duties, the team was able to build relationships, focus, and take advantage of AMCHP and ASTHO's technical assistance.
- The relationships built over the preconception health process are still benefitting participants. In a small state like South Carolina, stakeholders working on related issues often cross paths and have the opportunity to collaborate.

Lessons Learned: Website

- The SC Campaign believes that Carolina Teen Health is an excellent investment because it is tangible, dynamic, and has staying power as a source of information for adolescents.
- Carolina Teen Health can only be a source of information to adolescents if it is relevant to their lives. Listening to the youth voice in the development and maintenance of Carolina Teen Health keeps the site relevant to its target audience.
- Nonprofits and state agencies can create synergy. Nonprofits can help with marketing and advocate for issues state agencies cannot. For instance, SC DHEC capitalizes on the SC Campaign's unique ability to reach youth by funding parts of the website. And state agencies often have the authority and scope to take the lead on emerging issues.

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[South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy](#)

[Not Right Now](#)



Communicating Preconception and Teen Pregnancy Prevention Messages

[Carolina Teen Health](#)

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