



HOW TO

Tactics for Engaging Employers in Community Alliances

May 2013

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Related Reading

- [Bullish on Business: Engaging Employers in Health Care](#), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- [Employer Engagement Learning Collaborative: Resource Directory](#), American Institutes for Research
- [Alliances and Employers: Working Together for High-Value Care](#), American Institutes for Research
- [How Alliances Can Partner with Employers in the Current Health Care Landscape](#) (PPT), American Institutes for Research
- [The Communication Toolkit](#), American Institutes for Research

About Aligning Forces for Quality

Aligning Forces for Quality (AF4Q) is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's signature effort to lift the overall quality of health care in targeted communities, as well as reduce racial and ethnic disparities and provide real models for national reform. The Foundation's commitment to improve health care in 16 AF4Q communities is the largest effort of its kind ever undertaken by a U.S. philanthropy. AF4Q asks the people who get care, give care and pay for care to work together to improve the quality and value of care delivered locally. The Center for Health Care Quality in the Department of Health Policy at George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services serves as the national program office. Learn more about AF4Q at www.forces4quality.org. Learn more about RWJF's efforts to improve quality and equality of care at www.rwjf.org/qualityequality/af4q/.

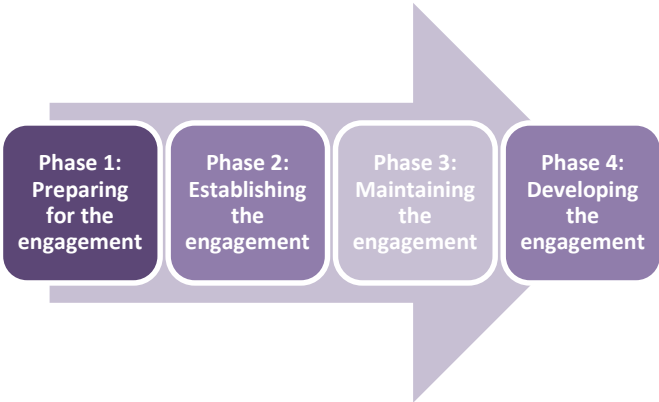
About the Author

American Institutes for Research (AIR) provides technical assistance for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's *Aligning Forces for Quality* initiative. AIR is working with Aligning Forces communities to support consumer engagement efforts to promote higher-quality health care at lower cost and authored this publication.

Most of the Aligning Forces for Quality communities (the Alliances) are eager to involve local employers in their work, both as purchasers that have a huge stake in an improved health care and payment system and as channels for communicating with employees and their families. Some Alliances also regard the engagement and ongoing support of employers as one of the keys to their long-term sustainability. But cultivating and maintaining relationships with employers has been an ongoing challenge.

The purpose of this document is to offer quick access to promising tactics based on what Alliances have been doing to attract and retain employers as partners. The tactics are organized into two major steps:

- Courtship: Getting to know each other**
 - This step mirrors the first two phases in the employer engagement process: Preparing for engagement and establishing the engagement.
- Marriage: Meeting each other’s needs**—This step mirrors the last two phases of the engagement process: Maintaining the engagement and developing the engagement.



Courtship: Getting To Know Each Other

In this stage, Alliances focus on identifying potential partners in the employer community, introducing themselves as an organization, and becoming familiar with the concerns and information needs of local employers. As a first step in building relationships, Alliances have to get employers to the point where they are at least receptive to hearing the case for being involved with the Alliance. Common challenges include limited staff and financial resources, difficulty getting national employers to focus on local issues, and in some cases, minimal familiarity with employers and other purchasers in the community. One theme in these tactics is the importance of identifying and partnering with organizations in your market that are inherently conveners of and communicators with local businesses.

“Courtship” tactics include:

1. Peer-to-Peer Recruitment
2. Employer Surveys or Interviews
3. Hosting an Event
4. Outreach Through Benefit Management Companies
5. Presentations to Employers

A Snapshot of Who’s Doing What

This table indicates which Alliances have taken steps over the past few years to implement the engagement strategies described in this brief. Please note the table includes only those Alliances that participated in an Employer Engagement Learning Collaborative between September 2011 and August 2012.

Alliances	Courtship: Getting To Know Each Other					Marriage: Meeting Each Other’s Needs		
	Peer-to-Peer Recruitment	Employer Surveys or Interviews	Hosting an Event	Outreach Through Benefit Management Companies	Presentations to Employers	A Seat at the Table	Education, Programs, and Tools for Employers	Information for Employees
Albuquerque	X	X	X			X		
Boston					X			X
Cincinnati		X		X	X	X	X	X
Kansas City					X	X	X	
Memphis					X	X		X
Minnesota			(Planning)		X	X	X	X
Oregon						X	X	X
Puget Sound (WA)	X		X		X	X	X	X
South Central Pennsylvania	X	X	X		X	X		X
Western Michigan			X			X	X	X
Western New York	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Tactic 1: Peer-to-Peer Recruitment

What's the idea? Use one or a few well-connected local business leaders to jumpstart or reinvigorate interest and enthusiasm for the Alliance's activities. By working through people who are already known and trusted, Alliances can identify potentially receptive partners, overcome their lack of name recognition, and improve the response rate for their outreach efforts.

Implementing this tactic: Tips and lessons learned

- Identify one or more business leaders who are supportive of the Alliance and respected in the employer community.
 - **Tip:** When possible, take advantage of an existing relationship with a local business leader. The “champion” for the Aligning Forces for Quality South Central Pennsylvania (SCPA), for example, was a member of the Alliance Board and the chair of its parent organization, the Healthy York County Coalition. As head of the region's United Way, he also was well connected in the business community.
 - **Tip:** If the Alliance does not have an existing relationship with an employer, seek out potential champions associated with business groups that are already involved in local health care programs in some way. Executives with local hospitals or health plans also may be interested in playing this role.
- Ask your champions to identify peers who may be interested in the Alliance's work. SCPA's champion started with his contacts in the local Rotary Club.
- Collaborate with your champions to invite their contacts to an event hosted by the Alliance. (See Tactic 3: Hosting an Event.) The champions—not the Alliance—should send the invitation to a select number of people in their address books and ask them to forward the invitation to a few of their own contacts.
 - **Tip:** Make sure the invitation includes some brief information about your organization and what it has to offer employers. The invitation to SCPA's event emphasized how the Alliance can inform employers about payment reform and other key health care issues and help them educate employees about getting quality care, being engaged patients, and adopting healthy behaviors.
- Design a compelling and topical event for the participants. Include time for participants to discuss what topics and information would be relevant to them.
 - **Tip:** Keep track of the issues and concerns that interest your attendees and follow up with specific action items within two weeks of the event.

Example from the Field: Albuquerque's Story

The Albuquerque Coalition for Healthcare Quality started the engagement process early on in the project by reaching out to several of the largest employers in the area. Although it was unclear how the Alliance would be able to meet the needs of local employers, it was able to show the employers it had a framework, a vision, and a plan. These employers understood that nothing like this coalition existed within the community and saw the potential of the Alliance and local employers coming together on health care issues. To support the Alliance's efforts, these employers provided suggestions and contact information for other businesses in the community. By the time the list was finished, the Alliance had 300-500 people to contact. As a result, about 70 people attended the Alliance's first meeting aimed at employers.

Available resource:

- [The invitation to employers sent by the “champion” for the SCPA](#)

Tactic 2: Employer Surveys or Interviews

What's the idea? Administer a survey or conduct interviews with employers to determine what topic areas interest the business community, inform the development of new services and products that would meet employers' needs, or evaluate how effectively the Alliance is supporting the business community's need for information on health care quality. Employers are not a homogenous group: They vary by size, structure, and use of insurance. Getting to know the

employers in your region and how they vary within your region can be an invaluable step toward determining how best to reach and attract the employers that would be a good fit with the Alliance.

Implementing this tactic: Tips and lessons learned

- Determine what you want to learn from area employers and how you would use this information to build a relationship with and support employers as health care purchasers. Being clear about your goals will help you keep the questions brief and to the point. For example:
 - The Albuquerque Coalition wanted to identify common areas of interest, inform the development of resources for employers and their employees, and provide strategic direction to its Business Health Advisory Group.
 - The SCPA wanted to gauge employers' awareness of the Alliance, determine what interests local employers, and assess how those interests align with those of members of its Business Council on Health. It expects to use the results to help set priorities and possibly expand the group.
 - The P2 Collaborative of Western New York focused its employer survey on wellness programs (i.e., the kinds of programs employers already had and the obstacles they encountered in setting up those programs). That information helped identify existing gaps and opportunities for the Collaborative.
- Decide which approach to gathering information would best meet your needs. A **survey** allows for a greater breadth of response. **Interviews**, on the other hand, offer a more in-depth understanding of employers' needs.
 - **Tip:** In areas with fairly homogenous employers or a few very large employers, interviews can be more effective.
 - **Tip:** Because interviews are time-intensive, consider hiring someone outside of the Alliance to conduct the interviews and report the findings.
 - **Tip:** Take advantage of online survey tools (e.g., Survey Monkey) that facilitate distributing the survey and presenting results at low or no cost.
- Develop a short list of survey or interview questions. The Albuquerque Coalition's survey included questions about what specific conditions affected employees most, what elements were most important in choosing benefit options, and what tools employers would be most likely to use in the future.
 - **Tip:** Consult with AIR, which has helped other Alliances develop their survey questions.
 - **Tip:** As one of the first questions, ask respondents to provide the name of their organization and their contact information. That enables the Alliance to follow up with those who do not complete the survey.
 - **Tip:** Ask respondents to provide basic "demographic" information about their employer, such as number of employees, types of insurance offered, and number of locations.
- Generate a list of email addresses for employers in your region.
 - **Tip:** Ask employers that are already involved in the Alliance in some way to help disseminate the

Lessons Learned from Interviewing Employers in Cincinnati

In the spring of 2012, the Health Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati interviewed human resource directors and benefit managers from 10 diverse employers, including large, national companies; self-insured companies; public employers; and small, commercially insured companies. Through these 45-60-minute interviews, the Alliance learned about the employers' benefits strategies and challenges, their wellness programs, and their views on the Alliance's YourHealthMatters site. The interviews gave the Alliance insight into the resources that could support employers' strategies and helped the Alliance determine that the most receptive targets for outreach efforts would be employers that are self-funded, have high-deductible plans, and express a strong interest in a wellness strategy.

"One thing that was a surprise to us was that even though we were talking to businesses with benefit and HR managers, they're not well informed about any of these issues."

survey to their peers.

- **Tip:** Build the list from names you already have access to. The SCPA had built a list of 250 email addresses from the local Chamber of Commerce and an annual wellness event for human resources directors.
- **Tip:** Lay the groundwork by informing the pool of targeted employers about the survey and the importance of their participation.
- **Tip:** Recognizing that a high response rate will yield more useful information, be realistic about the number of responses you are likely to get. Of the 250 people (representing 178 businesses) the Albuquerque Coalition contacted, for example, 48 started the survey and 32, representing at least 15 different employers, completed it. The SCPA has responses from about one-fifth of the survey sample, many of which are incomplete.
- **Tip:** If you are not getting enough responses, send reminder emails and extend the timeframe.
- Analyze the results to identify similarities and differences in responses. If feasible, look for differences in employers' responses by size and insurance strategy (fully insured versus self-insured).
 - **Tip:** Determine what sort of analysis you will want before you collect any data so you ask for the information you need and have a way to perform the analysis. Online surveys typically are designed to analyze and report the results automatically.
- Share and discuss the results with employers involved in the Alliance.
- Follow up with survey or interview participants to let them know what you plan to do with their responses, and thank them for participating.

Available resources:

Copies of sample surveys and interview questions are available in the EELC Resource Center:

- [A generic survey for employers \(developed by AIR\)](#)
- [Survey questions used by the Albuquerque Coalition](#)
- [Cincinnati's interview guide](#)

Also available:

- Results from Western New York's wellness survey: <http://p2wny.org/employer/>
(Select "P2 Wellness Survey" from left-hand menu)

Tactic 3: Hosting an Event

What's the idea? Plan an event for local business leaders that is aimed at laying the groundwork for employers' support for the Alliance's activities, future partnerships, and community-wide activities related to the Alliance's mission. Often referred to as Leadership or CEO Summits, these can be one-time events or a series of smaller events that offer insights into relevant issues, with particular emphasis on payment reform, and encourage employers to work with the Alliance to improve the delivery of care across the community. The events can serve as a two-way street by providing valuable information to the employers and also enabling the Alliance to gain the employers' input and support.

Example from the Field: Pennsylvania's Story

In October 2011 the SCPA convened an "invitation-only" summit on payment reform for employers and providers. The 60 attendees included 25 employer representatives, 25 provider representatives, and 10 people from other organizations in the community. The summit featured presentations on the patient-centered medical home, a local initiative called the Planned Care Collaborative, a local third-party benefit administrator's new vision for health plan benefit design, and an open discussion about implementing payment reform with primary care practices in York and Adams counties.

Two key outcomes of the summit were a consensus among employers and providers to work toward a common goal of paying for value and not volume within the next five years and a verbal commitment from six business leaders to form an "SCPA Business Council on Health."

Implementing this tactic: Tips and lessons learned

- Through networking or other outreach methods, invite senior leaders and CEOs at local employers to attend a meeting that focuses on topics of interest to health care purchasers, such as local payment reform initiatives.
 - **Tip:** Include local physician, hospital, and health plan leaders in the guest list to facilitate a dialogue across payers, purchasers, and providers.
 - **Tip:** If your list of potential contacts is small, make the event exclusive to invitees to highlight its importance. The invitation circulated for the SCPA's event indicated that the recipient was among a limited group selected to participate.
 - **Tip:** Expect about one-third of those invited to attend, and anticipate that not everyone who says they will come will actually show up. Consequently, if you are anticipating 50-70 attendees, consider inviting at least 150 people.
 - **Tip:** Consider "priming the pump" by offering a free webinar or lunch meeting for employers before the in-person meeting. About one month before an in-person meeting with employers and providers, the SCPA invited Harold Miller to introduce value-based purchasing issues to employers.
- Schedule meetings for no more than half a day or one full day.
- Invite speakers who can offer both a local perspective and a national perspective on AF4Q and key health care issues.
 - **Tip:** Consider getting ideas for session topics from a survey or interviews with employers.
 - **Tip:** Allocate some time to communicating what attendees could gain by partnering with the Alliance, either as members of Alliance committees or simply as users of the Alliance's materials. The Alliance for Health in West Michigan, for example, hosted a CEO Health Care Summit in 2011 to:
 - update CEOs and senior executives of West Michigan businesses and public-sector employers about the AF4Q initiative;
 - present value propositions for business support of AF4Q; and
 - encourage attendees to invest time, financial support, and expertise of staff in AF4Q projects.
- Ask the attendees what matters to them and discuss how their input can shape the products and services the Alliance offers. After the meeting, follow up with any employer representatives who express interest in the Alliance. After the CEO summit, for example, the Western Michigan Alliance held two more meetings in which employers played a prominent role by hosting and speaking. These meetings led to the development of a small planning group focused on engaging 10 relatively large employers in the area.

Available resources:

- [Summary of SCPA's Summit for Employers and Providers](#)

Tactic 4: Outreach Through Benefit Management Companies

What's the idea? Take advantage of the existing relationship between benefit management companies and their clients to pass on information from the Alliance to employers. This information could include communication tools as well as information about the Alliance and its products. For the Alliance, this relationship offers the benefit of expanding its reach through a trusted intermediary. For the benefit management company, sharing information about a community resources allows it to provide "added value" to its clients and has the potential of creating a halo effect.

The Health Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati tested this idea by partnering with Mercer, a health benefits company that works with large, medium, and small employers in the area. While that experiment did not bear fruit, the Alliance is preparing to test the idea again with a different firm.

Implementing this tactic: Tips and lessons learned

- To get in the door with the benefit management companies in your area, start by taking advantage of any existing relationships that Alliance staff or affiliated employers have with these firms.
- Give a presentation to the account managers explaining the purpose of the Aligning Forces program, the mission of the Alliance, and the nature of available tools and resources, including websites with public reports on quality and cost.
- Provide the account managers with a toolkit of materials for them to share with employers, including slides with talking points they can use in their own presentations.

Available resource:

- [The Health Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati's Employer Toolkit](#)

Tactic 5: Presentations to Employers

What's the idea? Seek opportunities to showcase what the Alliance offers employers vis-à-vis public reporting, consumer education and engagement, and data on health care quality and costs. By providing “hands-on” information and training, this approach is similar in purpose to an Alliance-sponsored event, but it reduces the burden on the Alliance by taking advantage of existing opportunities to speak with employers in the community. Possible forums include in-person and virtual meetings for local and regional employers, particularly those that focus on health care purchasing and benefit design issues. Large employers, including public agencies, may be interested in presentations for their health benefits staff only.

Implementing this tactic: Tips and lessons learned

- Identify organizations that represent and convene employers of different sizes in the region.
 - **Tip:** Take advantage of other local initiatives that are bringing employers together. For example:
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) chose a county in the Memphis area for a healthy worksite program that involves wellness and benefits staff in small and medium-sized businesses. The Healthy Memphis Common Table is planning to work through this program to introduce this captive audience of employers to the Alliance and its resources.
 - The Kansas City Quality Improvement Consortium (KCQIC) has started partnering with the Local Investment Commission (LINC), a social services organization based in Kansas City, to meet with state purchasers and local school districts and identify other potential employers interested in working with the Alliance.
 - **Tip:** Consider the fit between your messages and the audience. The Memphis Business Group on Health, which works closely with the local Alliance, found that staff who work on wellness issues were more receptive than benefits staff to presentations about helping employees get high-quality care (see tactic 8).
- Research the topics the organization has addressed to determine whether there is an opening to introduce the Alliance and its work in the community. If so, approach the organization's staff to discuss potential opportunities to share information with the employers.
- Have something concrete to offer employers and be able to articulate the short-term value to them of what you are offering. Healthy Memphis Common Table learned from a local Chamber of Commerce that employers—especially small and medium-sized ones—would want to know they are getting something before they would take the time to hear what the Alliance had to say.
- Draw a clear connection between the resources the Alliance offers and the day-to-day work of the people in the audience. Alliances are finding they cannot assume that even benefits staff know much about health benefits

because most do not specialize at that level, let alone the relevance of the quality of care issues that the Alliances address.

Available resources:

- [Alliances and Employers: Working Together for High-Value Health Care](#): Memo explaining how the Business Case document can be customized by each Alliance to support its employer engagement efforts and Word document that can be customized to help your Alliance educate and engage local employers

Marriage: Meeting Each Other's Needs

This stage focuses on creating a mutually beneficial relationship: providing products and services that have value to employers and getting something of value in return. One of the major obstacles to getting to this point is convincing employers they will benefit from devoting time and effort to participating in the Alliance. Another challenge is devoting the time and effort required to keep the employers engaged in the Alliance as their needs and interests evolve. One Alliance reported that because it had failed to harness the initial enthusiasm of employer members, it encountered dwindling support from employers, resulting in poor participation in activities designed for the business community. Several of these tactics allow for different levels of engagement to create sustainable, long-lasting relationships.

"Marriage" tactics include:

1. A Seat at the Table
2. Education, Programs, and Tools for Employers
3. Information for Employees

Tactic 6: A Seat at the Table

What's the idea? Involve employers in the Alliance in an advisory capacity. This can be done by creating employer-only committees or including representatives of the employer community in the Alliance's multi-stakeholder boards. The Albuquerque Coalition, for example, developed a Business Health Advisory Group (BHAG) that meets regularly to support Alliance activities. This group of 15 to 20 employers, representing medium and large businesses, identifies and shares best practices, identifies ways employers can support the initiatives of the Alliance, and identifies ways the Alliance can support employers' needs. Members of the BHAG include both public and private employers: the City of Albuquerque, Albuquerque Public Schools, Sandia National Laboratories, Bernalillo County, Public Service Company of New Mexico, New Mexico Gas Company, the University of New Mexico, ARCA, Sandia Staffing Alliance, and Payday, Inc.

In communities where employers have already come together in a business health coalition, the relationship can be mutual. Alliances can give the business coalition a seat on its board and vice versa. Through close collaboration, the Alliances in Oregon, Memphis, and Western New York have been able to harness these established groups to support their activities and programs.

Example from the Field: Oregon's Mutually Rewarding Partnership with Public Purchasers

The Oregon Health Quality Corporation has an ongoing relationship with two very large public purchasers: the Public Employees' Benefit Board and the Oregon Educators Benefit Board. Both purchasers require their insurers to provide data to the Alliance. They also offer links to the Alliance's web-based quality report from their websites and use newsletters and other communications to promote the Alliance's site as a resource to their members. As a result, these purchasers' sites are among the top 10 referring sites for the Alliance's public reports.

Implementing this tactic: Tips and lessons learned

- Invite employers identified through peer-to-peer recruitment, surveys or interviews, or Alliance-sponsored events to offer advice and feedback to the Alliance by participating in a committee on a regular basis. The South Central Pennsylvania Alliance used its in-person meeting to develop a group of 10 large, self-insured employers.
- Bring employers together to meet regularly. The employers in South Central Pennsylvania are scheduled to meet every other month. In Puget Sound, the purchaser affinity group meets quarterly.
- Use the meetings to identify and address employers' educational and informational needs (e.g., to understand whether and how they could adopt strategies such as bundled payments) and come to consensus on projects the

employers could undertake together (e.g., wellness programs or strategies to improve care for high-utilization conditions and procedures). Meetings also are an opportunity to encourage employers to serve as “ambassadors” for the Alliance when meeting with other employers.

- **Tip:** Make sure each meeting has a purpose, e.g., to discuss issues that concern employers or plan a targeted initiative. The model of standing meetings to hear others report does not work for employer stakeholders.
- **Tip:** Harness the influence of the few employers who are already informed and convinced of what needs to be done to move the others toward payment reforms or other initiatives.
- Consider giving employers an opportunity to participate in both multi-stakeholder committees and their own group. In Cincinnati and Oregon, employers are represented in the leadership group and in other committees but do not have a group of their own. In South Central Pennsylvania, on the other hand, employers have their own group as well as a role in the leadership steering group and in councils focused on payment reform, transitions of care, and consumer engagement. In addition to a separate affinity group, purchasers in Puget Sound are also well represented on the organization’s board.
 - **Tip:** Before forming a separate group for employers, consider whether they are already represented by a purchaser coalition in the area.
- On occasion, invite outside speakers to meet with employers to help them understand what’s happening in similar environments. For example, hearing from Donna Marshall, executive director of the Colorado Business Group on Health, gave Albuquerque employers insight into what other employers are doing—even at the CEO level.

Tactic 7: Education, Programs, and Tools for Employers

What’s the idea? Offer local employers a valued service or information product related to the Alliance’s mission. The services and products can be geared toward mid-level managers (such as human resources staff) or executive-level managers. Services could include a regular educational series, such as brown bag seminars, webinars, networking events, or participation in employers’ health fairs. Products could include data—including customized reports—that address employers’ specific information needs. (See box about the Puget Sound Alliance.)

Another potential product is written material designed to educate managers about pertinent health care issues. Minnesota Community Measurement (MNCM) developed a toolkit for employers to educate them about quality reporting, the resources MNCM offers, and the link between quality information and health outcomes. It also provided a series of one-pagers with condition-specific (e.g., asthma) information.

Implementing this tactic: Tips and lessons learned

- Dedicate staff resources to focusing on employers as stakeholders in the Alliance and as users of the Alliance’s resources. Several Alliances have noted that Project Directors and other staff do not have the time to figure out what employers need and how best to meet those needs.

Example from the Field: Puget Sound’s Story

The Puget Sound Health Alliance offers employer members access to data on resource use for high-volume hospitalizations in the region, which tells them how consistently and intensively the delivery system provides care. Purchasers use these data to talk with delivery systems about the intensity of care, variations in case, and the outcomes they are getting. The Alliance now is working with the purchasers to obtain aggregated price information from the health plans to assign prices to episodes of care. For large self-funded purchasers that provide their claims data, the Alliance also provides customized reports that show how their employee population compares to the region as a whole on all of the measures included in the Community Checkup.

- Based on input from local employers, identify the interests and needs the Alliance could address. In meetings and other interaction with employers, invite specific feedback on ways the Alliance could work with and inform employers, including possible topics and speakers.
- Invite the employers to participate in a series of educational or networking events. Presentations by experts on various topics should focus on giving participants tangible, actionable information that will help their organizations. The Puget Sound Health Alliance has offered webinars on value-based benefit design as well as a workshop on identifying actionable data sources within the organization.
 - **Tip:** While it is important to plan strategically about offerings, take advantage of opportunities that present themselves through other channels.
- Be sure to offer data the employers can use in some way to identify and solve problems. By providing employers with data stratified by the data supplier rather than the provider, the Puget Sound Health Alliance enables employers to identify areas where they need to take action.
 - **Tip:** Focus on data that are strategically aligned with the Alliance’s goals. For example, the Puget Sound Health Alliance’s work with resource use data was a strategic decision to push beyond ambulatory care into high-volume, high-cost areas of immediate interest to purchasers.

“Employers are hungry for information that is relevant to the work they’re doing on a day-to-day basis.”

—Puget Sound Health Alliance

Tactic 8: Information for Employees

What’s the idea? Support employers’ interests in educating and informing employees and their families about health care quality and costs by providing targeted messages, customizable materials, and easy access to pertinent comparative information. By offering employers content that is relevant and “ready to go,” Alliances can make it easy for employers to communicate about a complex topic.

A comprehensive example of this tactic comes from the Puget Sound Health Alliance, which developed a turnkey program for employers called “Own Your Health” that was adapted from AIR’s Communication Toolkit. This campaign offers a combination of social media, a website, lunch-and-learn sessions, and customized materials to help employers communicate about health improvement and the value of quality information. The Memphis Business Group on Health, a partner of the Healthy Memphis Common Table, also developed a module based on the Communication Toolkit and presented it in training sessions with benefits managers at five large employers in the community. A third example is the Health Collaborative in Cincinnati, which created a toolkit for benefits managers with 10 one-page articles aimed at promoting employees’ awareness of health care quality issues.

A related implementation of this tactic involves working with employers to provide employees with direct links to quality information—both educational information as well as performance data—from the employers’ systems. In Minnesota, for example, employees of the state are encouraged to follow a link to the Alliance’s website to review data on physician practices before choosing providers.

Another possibility is to offer programs to consumers through their employers. In South Central Pennsylvania, employers can offer patient empowerment and wellness programs developed by the Alliance in partnership with larger health care organizations in the area.

“It’s a lot of work. If you want people to do the right thing, you need to make it as easy as possible for them to do it. If you can hand it to them all wrapped up in a bow, they are more likely to use and be grateful for it.”

—Puget Sound Health Alliance

Implementing this tactic: Tips and lessons learned

- Adapt and brand resources from AIR’s Communication Toolkit: <http://www.helpyouremployeeshealth.com/>.
- Consider customizing the educational content for individual employers so it can be relayed through their own communication channels.

- Emphasize the Alliance’s role as a neutral communicator of health care information, unlike the health plans and employers that are not always trusted by employees.
- Make the materials readily available. The Health Collaborative in Cincinnati posts educational content for consumers that employers can use and provides a print version in a toolkit about Alliance products that is distributed to employers during introductory meetings.
- Be alert to the limitations of employers as a channel for the Alliance’s programs. In Pennsylvania, for example, the Alliance found employers were not able to dedicate the staff needed to serve as team leader for a 12-week wellness class.

Available resources:

- Puget Sound Health Alliance’s site for [Own Your Health](#)
- [A case study about Puget Sound Health Alliance’s Own Your Health campaign](#)
- The Health Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati’s [Employer Toolkit](#)
- [Profiles of Toolkit Users](#), including the Memphis Business Group on Health and the Health Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati
- [Webinars about using the Communication Toolkit](#)

Key Takeaways for Community Alliances

The experiences of the Aligning Forces for Quality communities bring to light several important tips for any organization seeking to engage employers in their health-related initiatives:

- Expect the process of cultivating relationships with employers to take time and require attention on an ongoing basis.
- Make sure you are able to answer the employers’ question: “What’s in it for me?”
- Build relationships with a few well-connected employers who can serve as “champions” for the Alliance, helping to share information and draw attention to the Alliance’s initiatives.
- Offer something of value before asking for something of value (including time, attention, and money).
- Recognize that your priorities and interests are not exactly the same as those of employers. You have to make the effort to get to know local employers, identify their concerns, and communicate regularly and in specific terms how the Alliance can help them meet their own goals.
- Present the Alliance as a valuable source of education for managers and executives. Human resources and benefits managers are not likely to be familiar with health care quality and cost issues in the same way Alliances are.
- Consider targeting public purchasers, which often share the Alliance’s community-oriented goals.
- Aim for “small wins” you can share with others and build upon over time.

“What is key is making this happen person to person. It takes a lot of time. [It] needs to be face to face, calls. It’s an effort...It’s never a one shot deal.”

— Health Collaborative of Greater Cincinnati

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