



Outreach to Rural Communities Tip Sheet

This tip sheet is provided as a resource to help SMPs, SHIPs, and MIPPAs reach Medicare beneficiaries, partners, and volunteers in rural communities, in order to share information about their program(s) throughout these communities.

Identifying and engaging new partners

It is important to remember that in smaller, sparsely-populated areas, outreach can and does occur in formats little-used in larger cities. A key element to that outreach is the development of partnerships, through which messaging and outreach can occur. Another factor to embrace is the “local” nature of those partners. Whether a locally-owned media outlet or locally-led service or civic organizations, their role in the community assures a level of acceptance that might not otherwise occur, and it is easier to gain their trust.

Potential partners in rural communities

- Public health and medical providers
- Community action agencies
- Churches and community religious alliances
- Arts & cultural organizations
- Chambers of commerce
- Fraternal organizations (e.g. Elks)
- Service clubs (e.g. Rotary, Kiwanis)
- City officials (e.g. mayor, city council members)
- Hospital volunteer groups
- Farm groups, community-support agriculture (e.g. farmers’ markets)
- Veterans groups

Finding and recruiting volunteers in rural areas

Small-town residents and rural Americans share a culture of public service. Engaging them to assist with a worthwhile cause may be only a phone call or email away. Finding them and making that ask will require the help of partners, influential local leaders and early-engaged volunteers.

- Focus on the need to stand up to people who are gaming the system.
- Consider that they're probably already wearing 10 hats.
- Use volunteers to find other volunteers.
- Find a key local leader (mayor) to endorse your effort and assist in recruitment.
- Seek non-traditional or individuals rarely called upon.

Tips for reaching Medicare beneficiaries

It's not difficult to find rural and small-town residents over the age 65. Rural America is, on average, older than urban areas. That said, they still have to be identified and convinced this is a valuable use of their time.

Methods to use

- Local newspaper
- Local radio station
- Facebook or other social media, especially for events
- Flyers around town
- Coffee shop table tents
- Articles in newsletters for local organizations
- Local hospital and clinics
- Senior center bulletin board
- Congregate meal sites
- Church bulletins

Tips to consider as you craft your messaging

Finding partners and identifying the best ways to reach both volunteers and Medicare beneficiaries are important. Successfully leveraging those partners and volunteers requires the right message.

- Certain themes will resonate with rural residents:
 - This is an important job that affects everyone.
 - The long-term viability of Medicare is at stake.
 - Stopping Medicare abuse and fraud requires a team effort.
- Telling real stories can be impactful.
- Public service is a virtue in small towns.
- Everyone's help is necessary to protect the program.