



THE
MELLMAN
Group RESEARCH
BASED
STRATEGY

TO: Think Inc & The Eleanor Foundation
FROM: The Mellman Group
RE: Focus Group Research Findings
DATE: February 4, 2008

To be frank, the Eleanor Foundation's grantees' messaging could have required very complex and nuanced solutions. In truth, it does not—at least for now.

We could have found potential clients unwilling to utilize the services grantees offer for a host of psychological or sociological reasons. We did not. Indeed, to a person, these women knew they were in trouble and wanted help dealing with their challenges.

Far and away the most important thing the Foundation's grantees can do to increase participation is to increase awareness. Almost none of our participants had any accurate knowledge of the grantees or their programs. Many found the offerings intriguing, but simply had not heard of them previously.

Fortunately there are a variety of channels through which awareness can be increased. Some, like television and radio, cost money, while others require more work than dollars. Most of our participants use the web, as one would expect given the national statistics on internet usage by the working poor. In addition, their children's schools and medical providers offer ready-made networks of trusted advisors. Finally, neighborhood publications also can serve a useful awareness building function.

Communication should be directed to "working women." These participants see themselves as hard pressed, low income workers. "Working" is central to their identity. Referring to them in other ways, like "poor" or "at-risk," is off-putting and engenders resistance.

In communicating with these women, children will be the prime motivating force. Whatever life-changing decisions they make will be occasioned most often by recognition of the need to do better by and for their children. In essence, our messages should ask them to do it for their kids.

Likewise, education is the opportunity participants crave most. Programs that offer educational benefits would be wise to feature those in their messaging and communications.

However, moving women from awareness to action is not all about message—structural barriers are significant. First and foremost, these women have precious little time dealing with the demands of work, family, children, transportation, etc. without the resources other men and women have to help them cope. To the extent

that the application process or the programs themselves are seen as time consuming, participants will be less likely to avail themselves of the opportunities. To the extent the rules are seen as complex or arcane, participants will also be less likely to sign up. Indeed, given their time constraints, simply the fear of arcane qualification procedures, as well as the fear of rejection, will keep people away.

The Uncertain Nature Of Qualitative Research

This memorandum represents our findings from four focus groups among low-income, working women conducted in Chicago, IL on October 23-24, 2007. Participants in our focus groups were screened to be 18-44 years old, unmarried, and had attained less than a four-year college degree. They were employed full-time, the primary breadwinner for their household, and had an annual household income of less than \$30,000. At least four-of-five women in each group had a child under 18 living at home.

We held one group each of Latinas, African Americans, and Caucasian women, as well as one group with a mix of races. Moderators of each group were matched ethnically to ensure that participants felt comfortable interacting with the moderator, each other, and discussing cultural specificities from which they may otherwise refrain.

It is important to remember that qualitative research findings cannot be projected onto the population at large. In opinion research, the qualitative approach seeks to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively precise or absolute measures. Focus groups help us explore how people think about issues. The small, non-random nature of the sample precludes generalization. While these people's opinions provide rich material for analysis, they cannot be considered representative of the population at large.

Inconsistencies in respondents' views should be considered as valid data. While the participants may be misinformed or simply wrong in their knowledge or judgment, we should interpret this as useful information about their level of understanding. This study cannot be considered reliable or valid in the statistical sense. This type of research is intended to provide an early step in determining knowledge, awareness, attitudes and opinions.

Barriers That Weren't There

One important goal of messaging can be to overcome barriers to action by allaying concerns and tamping down fears. To that end, we examined a series of potential barriers that our initial discussions with you and grantees indicated might inhibit low income working women from accessing the kinds of services that the Eleanor Foundation supports. Fortunately, few of these putative barriers proved real or substantial.

- **Low-income working Women Recognize Their Need For Help:** Initially we feared that some of these women may not even recognize their need for assistance. That proved not to be the case. In fact, most participants had utilized some form of public assistance in the past, while a good number currently access some program and nearly all are willing to seek help through such programs.

As one woman in the mixed race group explained:

I didn't sit there. I went [and] got some public assistance. I'm telling you I went and get me some public assistance, did what they told me to do, went back up to the school—my son is now attending the same school that his brother is.

“I’m not too proud to ask for help when I need it. The daughter is just all the more reason. I never let pride in the way.” -- Caucasian Female

“When you go and you need help, you’re struggling, you have these kids, and you’ve worked all your life...I’m not asking you for money, I’m asking you for some food.” –Latina Female

A Caucasian woman noted:

I was on public aid and so that's how I started. When I started working they helped me pay for the babysitter...it's been around a long time.

- **There Is Little Stigma Associated With Receiving Help:** We hypothesized that a stigma could be associated with such programs that would make potential clients reluctant to use such services. Again, that proved to be incorrect. Participants were more than willing to ask for help and anxious to take a proactive approach to their lives. They are mostly self-reliant—serving as the primary breadwinner—and view help as a valuable tool to improve their lives.

- **Working Women Do Not See Themselves As “Different” From Those Who Receive Help:** Sometimes potential clients can look at a program and assume it is for “other” kinds of people, perhaps believing that “hardworking people like me” do not avail themselves of this kind of assistance. Again, there was little reality to this theory. Participants viewed themselves as precisely the kind of people who need assistance and did not ascribe any social distance to those who made use of such programs. When asked to describe who is participating in assistance programs, one African American woman avowed “It’s us! It’s us!”

Real Barriers

Nonetheless, the puzzle remains. Low income women are underserved; if not for the reasons some feared, then why?

- **Lack of Awareness of Programs Is the Most Significant Barrier:** The simple overriding fact is that almost none of the women with whom we spoke had any real knowledge of any of the Eleanor grantees or their programs. Indeed few

were of aware of any non-profits except for large national organizations with substantial visibility like The United Way, The Boys And Girls Clubs, and Planned Parenthood. When asked about opportunities for help, most participants focused on public assistance programs. Only a handful of the women named non-profit assistance programs without any sort of prompt.

Not one participant in any of the focus groups mentioned a program supported by the Eleanor Foundation without prompting. Even when prompted, only a few in each group offered impressions of local non-profits—and many, though not all, of those impressions were inaccurate. Those recollections on the part of participants

Heartland Human Care Services	Very much so. They used to be Lake Park Service connected. They still use that name. – <i>Mixed Race Group Female</i>
City Colleges of Chicago	I go to one of them. There are seven of them I believe in different areas and they are the community colleges. – <i>Latina Female</i>
Association House	It's for kids to get them involved and get them off the street, things like that. They offer tutoring if they need help with school. – <i>Latina Female</i>
Mujeres Latinas In Action	They help women if they have been beaten or if they're going through a divorce or for paternity if you want to take the father so he can pay child support. – <i>Latina Female</i>
Housing Opportunities For Women	That's one of the programs associated with Chicago Housing Authority, but I know Housing Opportunity for Women is a HUD program as well. The Housing and Urban Development runs it, but they are a partnership with CHA. – <i>Mixed Race Group Female</i>
Chicago Women In Trades	They help women get into a trade. They have rallies, they have job fairs. – <i>Caucasian Female</i>
YWCA of Chicago	They provide places to stay for people who are abused and stuff like that. They help you get clothes and shoes. – <i>African American Female</i>
Catholic Charities	Food pantries. You can go once or twice a month if you need assistance. – <i>Latina Female</i> If it was not for Catholic Charities, my kids wouldn't have gotten what they got [at Christmas]. – <i>Caucasian Female</i>

are reported here, but the table itself can be misleading. The essential insights are not what was said but what was not—lack of awareness was the dominant motif.

Thus the single greatest obstacle for low income women is their lack of awareness of the opportunities provided by non-profits like the Eleanor Foundation's grantees. Conversely, the greatest opportunity is simply to increase the visibility of the organizations in the community. Below, we will discuss a variety of ways this can be done, but no aspect of message is more important than simply increasing awareness among the target population.

- **Many Women Worry That They Earn Just A Bit Too Much To Qualify:** Many participants saw a dissonance between earning too much to qualify for assistance programs and not making enough to get by. Based on other experience they worry that they may make a few dollars too much and therefore not qualify.

As a woman in the mixed race group explained:

You have to make “X” amount. If you make a dollar over that amount you will lose all your benefits, your insurance, your food stamps. You will lose it all and then that’s when you get in that gap. It’s like that one little gap and you’re stuck. You can’t pay for anything.

Some women shared experiences of having to lie about income qualifications or work around them. For instance, one Latina confessed:

My sister works at a flower shop and she had to ask her employer if she could get part of that in her check and the other part cash so they wouldn’t show because otherwise she won’t get her Medicaid card.

Another Latina simply stated:

Sometimes you have to lie on how much you pay rent so they can try and help you in some way.

Difficult And Arcane Qualification Criteria Suggest To Working Women It May Not Be Worth Applying: Participants’ experience suggests they may well not meet what they perceive to be the complex and restrictive standards governing participation in programs; these concerns are rooted in the same experience as those who just miss income criteria. Having enough children, but not too many; having a proper referral; and logistical requirements programs impose, such as having transportation and child care, all cause them to worry that in the end they will be disqualified from programs designed to help. Because they are so hard pressed and because time is such a precious commodity, it is difficult to invest the effort in trying to qualify, if, in the end, you believe you will not. Some of the programs put these criteria front and center in their materials, but respondents’ experience suggests that complex, bureaucratic criteria are common, if not universal.

Having Enough Children

“There are a lot more benefits for people with children. They think that people without children don’t need any help, but they still do.” – African American Female

“Yes, it helps you if you have more than one kid, and what is that saying? I’m sorry, but I believe they just have kids to get more help...If you have one kid, they don’t want to do anything.” – Caucasian Female

Referrals

“You have to get someone to refer you. It’s like why do I need to go through someone else if I already found out about this information?” –African American Female

“Well I don’t like step one it says the program only accepts individuals who have been referred to the program. It’s not like a walk-in program.” –Mixed Race Group Female

Logistical Requirements

I don’t qualify. Don’t have childcare...It doesn’t make sense. –Latina Female

“I don’t drive... I don’t know whether they’re going to have [transportation] service here and there, it’s hard for me to get around.” –Caucasian Female

As a result, applying might not just be a waste of time, but also result in ego-bruising rejection. As we saw, the pressure under which many of these women live leaves many on the emotional edge. Some are simply unwilling to risk rejection, even if it is based on “objective,” non-judgmental criteria.

As one Caucasian woman summarized:

I think a lot of us women, even myself, might be intimidated to try to go to a nonprofit organization. [We are] intimidated in a sense of maybe the rejection, of the “no” [of asking] for certain assistance for whatever it is.

These Hard Pressed Working Women Have Precious Little Time To Apply For Or Participate In Programs: Most participants feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of daily life and are hesitant to take on another obligation—even if it is seen as beneficial. As the sole providers for their family, they are overstretched with work, caring for their children and running a household, and find little time to focus on themselves. Even dealing with family emergencies can produce a cascading chain reaction of problems that prevent complete participation, which they fear will end up getting them removed from the program.

One Latina explained it best, stating:

Sometimes it's hard because they expect you to go there once a month or once every two months and you have to be taking off from work. But at work you can't be taking off just for [programs]

As noted above, this problem is exacerbated by concern that in the end they will not qualify anyway. But some went further suggesting they did not even have the time to participate in programs that may clearly help them, since these programs may place real demands on their already very full lives.

- **White And Latina Participants Worry That Programs Are Run By, And Therefore Serve, Others:** While their fears may well be invalid, white and Latina participants believe they face an additional barrier when seeking out assistance programs because of their race. Women in the White-only and Latina-only group—as well as White and Latina participants in the mixed race group—questioned whether they would be given a real chance in a system they believe is run by people from different backgrounds.

“I’m basically the one that does everything at home. I’m the one who’s working and taking care of them...I’m just happy that I’ve got a job and I get by with what I’m getting by with right now.” --Latina Female

“I work two jobs and I have four kids from seven to one. Nobody is going to watch your kids, do you know what I’m saying?” --African American Female

“One person doing it all. We have to do it all. We have to go to work to make money, take care of the kids, do the homework, get them in their clothes, feed them -- everything. Doctor’s appointments, everything.”--Caucasian Female

White women cited what they viewed as past experiences of discrimination, explicitly being denied benefits because of their skin color:

Every race pushes the race card and the thing about that is people really don't understand that in the city whites are a minority...I didn't get my daughter into the school...I went in there and said, 'what's going on? Why aren't I in?' Well the white quota is filled.

I have been told by other ladies in the Public Aid Office, when I was denied, they were like, 'it's because you're white.'

My mom went to file for assistance and her caseworker asked her, she's Caucasian, she said, 'I can't help you.' She said, 'if you were American Indian or Hispanic, I could have helped you,' so my mom was denied.

Latinas cited similar experiences with discrimination because of their race, and some felt African Americans are treated more favorable when it comes to receiving help.

I don't think there is enough financial goals for Latinas, as far as giving us a door as much as there are for other minorities. I do know that there are, but there aren't as many as for other minorities and I think that's a shame.

I went to go get my LAKE card too. Every time that I'm there we're all in line waiting. Over there it's mainly African American where the LAKE card spot is at...The next lady comes up and she's African American and they treat her all nice. It's all the time. That's what I see. I think it's kind of racial.

Latinas also face the added burden of presumed language barriers, recounting experiences where they were sent only Spanish literature, or were expected by case workers to speak only in Spanish.

Describing “Eleanor Women”

In reaching out to our target audience we necessarily apply labels to them, if only to suggest who the appropriate applicants are. In doing so there are descriptions our participants found apt, and others, used by some grantees, which they found off-putting or even offensive.

Consistent with their self-reliant and proactive worldview, these women emphasized their work ethic in describing themselves. Phrases such as “working class,” “working mom,” or even “working my-butt-off” were used in the groups to much agreement.

Some participants acknowledged economic inequality, based on education levels or life

“You can't save any money. You have to put gas in the car and gas is at \$3 dollars or more a gallon. You go to the store and buy and outfit or some clothes or whatever, the prices are sky high. I can't keep anything. Light bills and gas bills have sky rocketed. Taxes are going up. “–African American Female

”If you want to go and have fun you really can't because you have to pay your rent, your lights. “– Latina Female

choices, but they did not define themselves as a part of a particular social stratum. Most were concerned with the high cost of living and how it affects their daily lives. Basic needs, such as food, rent, utilities, and transportation, eat up most of their earnings and leave them with little or nothing for extras.

Despite being focused on costs, participants rejected class-based narratives and labels that conferred poverty, such as “poor,” “at- risk,” “homeless,” or “want something for free.” These terms failed to resonate with the women, who saw themselves as striving to make ends meet, even in spite of their difficulties--- rather than surrendering to poverty.

Motivating Eleanor Women

Children Motivate Change

Children are seen as the key motivating force in the lives of our participants. Realizing they want to do better by and for their children tends to be the realization that encourages change.

One woman from the mixed race group admitted:

My switch was when I looked at my daughter the first time and I realized that I have someone else to change for—not just myself—and especially because she’s a girl, I have to be a very strong woman for her.

Another woman described how her daughter motivated her to achieve:

In ten years I plan to have... my child’s financial security where she will be able to go to college. That’s very key for me. This is a great program that they started from kindergarten through university so I must either go to school to keep a job in order to keep her there.

Echoing these sentiments, one Caucasian woman stated:

That’s a main factor because even though I do have two teens... I still try to take college courses and it’s hard but I try to do it anyways. I’m trying to pass that along to my children that you’re never too old to learn.

I was in the hospital all day with my son for another accident....He’s broken his ankle three times. You never know... you can think everything is in order, everything is going right and then all of a sudden you get this call and it’s usually with one of the kids. –Caucasian Female

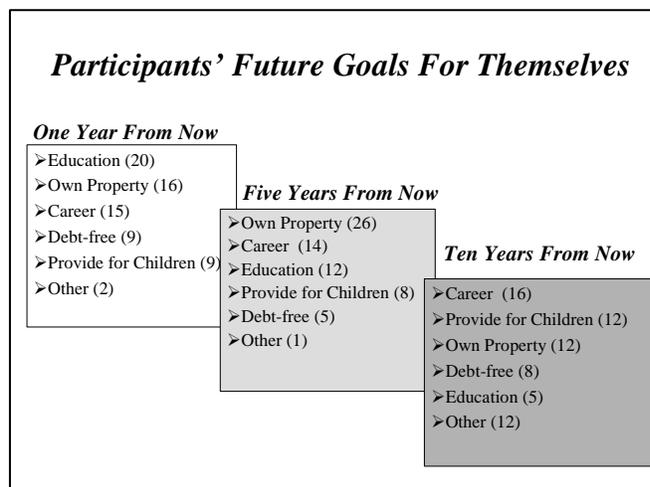
It’s hard to find somebody to take of the little ones. –Latina Female

While children are an important motivator, they also generate constraints on participants. Financially, they create unforeseen expenses— the costs of clothing, school supplies, and medical emergencies can arise at any point— and they also place limitations on free time. One Caucasian woman summed it up best, by stating, “With your children, once

you get one thing solved, there's another popped up."

Education Is Seen As The Foundation For Achieving Other Goals

Participants see educational attainment as their top priority in the immediate future. Asked to describe their future goals one year from now, most responses centered on their education, while later in life—once educational goals are achieved— participants focus on owning property, building careers, and broader life goals.



Education is seen as a lynchpin for attaining career and financial goals. Success in other areas often depends on earning a two or four year degree, and building from their educational achievements.

One Caucasian woman noted the importance of education when finding a job:

You have to have certain levels of education for certain things. Obviously, other things you pretty

much have to have...I was looking at just like basic secretary and you have to have like two years of other types of degrees.

Two African American women described its importance when earning more money:

Further my education and do something that causes me to get more money.

Go back to college or have a better job. I said to receive my degree, get promoted in my job and make more money.

Although education may contribute to higher salaries, achieving financial security and reducing debt— two long term goals— are somewhat less central to working women and are seen as the hardest to accomplish. Some women emphasized the importance of establishing good credit, but were unfamiliar with how to accomplish this goal. Others believed that long-term financial stability was a worthy— but unachievable— goal. Moreover, reducing debt ranked near the bottom of participants' list of goals, regardless of the time frame.

"A lot of people don't even have credit. I've never had credit. I don't know what credit is." -Mixed Race Group Female

"Being financially stable. I don't think anybody ever really gets financially stable." -Caucasian Female

"Having everything I want. Not rich, but comfortable." -African American Female

How Can We Communicate Most Effectively?

Leverage Working Women’s Concern with Their Children and Focus on Education to Create The Most Persuasive Messages

Messages that motivate low income working women will focus on the benefits to their children. They should be asked to do it for their kids. They should be told, couched in emotional or sentimental terms, how participation in a program will improve their children’s lives, as, from their perspective that is the ultimate benefit.

The most compelling feature of programs is education. These women see education as the key to achieving their other goals. So, where possible, grantees should emphasize the educational aspects of their programs or the ways in which participation would lead to higher levels of education.

Demonstrate Visually That Programs Help People Like Them

Though participants *said* they wanted to be involved with programs that were inclusive and helped everyone, it was also clear that they really wanted programs that included people that looked and seemed like them. Brochures that picture particular kinds of people are likely to attract those kinds of people—and pictures of everybody create some confusion about who the programs are actually designed to help.

As one Caucasian woman confessed,

I hated the fact that every individual in here is black. That makes you think maybe you’re not so bad off or why is it all black people depicted. Again, is it going to be race based?

Describe Services As Supportive Assistance That Builds On Participants’ Independence And Work Ethic, While Avoiding Judgmental Terms

Terms such as “assistance,” “motivating,” “supportive,” and “builds self-sufficiency” resonated strongly with participants. These phrases were the most appealing, ranking near the top of the list, when our discussants were asked to describe their ideal program. Participants relied heavily on “assistance” in their descriptions, believing it to be the central purpose of any service designed to help them.

One woman in the mixed race group explained:

My program begins with assistance. That’s my main concern is to assist whatever.

Another Latina noted the centrality of “assistance:”

You need assistance for anything. If you need help you're going to need assistance from somebody that's going to know how to assist you. Point you in the right way that you want to go to.

One Caucasian even applied “assistance” to different types of programs:

I had assistance...[it applies] all around basically. I described the education. I had some assistance to help me get through that. Along with it, if you need help as far as daycare is concerned, [there are] some programs for that.

“Self sufficiency” also appealed to participants, as both a term and a concept tied to their hard work. One woman from the mixed race group explained:

I really believe [self-sufficiency]. It just boils down to...just basically start with self and just you want to have it better for yourself, and that's where it has got to start from. When you go to these programs, you can't just expect them to just help you or just give you this help. You still have to do your work on your end. Help everyone because everybody could be going through a different situation, either lower class or higher class. How much is too much money when you're struggling?

Most Appealing Descriptors Of Participants' Ideal Programs			
Ranked by Net Score	# Most Appeal	# Least Appeal	Net Score
Assistance	23	0	23
Motivating	14	1	13
Supportive	13	0	13
Helps Everyone	15	4	11
Independent	10	0	10
Builds Self-Sufficiency	8	1	7
Growth	4	0	4
Inspiring	4	1	3
Change	4	2	2
Influential	1	0	1
Efficient	2	2	0
Enterprising	3	4	-1
Unique	3	5	-2
Exciting	0	4	-4
Faith-Based	2	11	-9
Tough Love	0	12	-12
Political	0	16	-16
Women Only	0	19	-19

“It just clashes here and when it says, ‘...help these individuals.’ Right that’s like putting us out like in a group.” –Mixed Race Group Females

“There are men out there that need help that are single fathers also. Even if they’re not fathers they are partners.” – Latina Female

Women aren’t the only ones who need help...that isn’t fair. –African American Females

[We’re] in a group. You’re over there and you stay over here. –Mixed Race Group

Judgmental and exclusive terms, such as “faith-based,” “tough love,” “political” and “women only” were rejected when describing services and programs. When describing their ideal organizations, participants found these phrases the least appealing and ranked them at the bottom of their lists.

Women in the focus groups objected to programs geared toward “women only,” “these individuals,” or any markers of an outside group.

Providing Hard Information Is Essential So Women Can Evaluate Prospective Opportunities

A full range of tailor-made services and programs appealed to participants, along with programs to build motivation. When asked to evaluate prospective programs, a description that coupled detailed information on the program’s structure (“participation in night classes, support-networks, and one-on-one mentoring”) with specific goals participants hope to achieve (“marketable skills sets, establishing six months of solid work history... finding affordable safe housing, quality child care”) was deemed to be most convincing. Another description focused on building motivation resonated with participants, encouraging them to “take responsibility for setting their own goals” and “giving them tools they need to build a life of self –sufficiency.”

Detailed descriptions of programs and services were compelling elements across all descriptions. Many women were quick to mention the specifics they liked in each program or simply commented on the details themselves.

One woman from the mixed race group stated:

I liked the details of the program that they gave. They weren't just general like some other paragraphs were. They were just like oh we are going to do one year job placement, you're going to do this, but they actually said we are going to help you by providing daycare, we're going to give you transportation money.

Another Caucasian woman agreed:

[I liked it] because it tells you about the program, what the program does for you and then it also gives you an example.

Some participants felt the services spoke for themselves as

reasons to participate in a program. When writing a note to their neighbor to encourage participation, many recounted specific details from the descriptions. One Latina wrote about “a program that provided day care and in the same place you can get job training, computer skills” while another African American woman wrote “Our

Most Convincing Descriptions Of Programs	
Ranked by Total Mean	TOTAL
Non-profit programs are specifically designed to help working women achieve their personal goals . Through participation in night classes, support-networks, and one-on-one mentoring ...confront their everyday challenges and take measurable strides toward their success...building marketable skill sets, establishing six months of solid work history, and assisting them step-by-step in the job search... finding affordable safe housing, quality child care, and teach working women how to clean up their credit histories....	5.07
Non-profit programs help working women achieve their personal goals, giving them the tools they need to build a life of self-sufficiency... Women take responsibility for setting their own goals... are not judged; they are supported...the biggest single predictor of success is motivation!	5.03
Non-profit programs empower working women as they look toward the future and help them envision the positive changes that lie ahead. Diana Greene—a single mother of two— held a steady job at the local grocery store... She felt trapped... but learn book-keeping skills...	4.84
Non-profit programs are tailored to the specific needs and lives of working women. These programs understand the day-to-day challenges that working women face: the stress of balancing.. these programs do not force a square peg into a round hole—they know some women may not even know what they need...	4.77
When Laverne Coley was homeless, she had no idea that her life could ever amount to anything. She was conditioned to settling for less in every aspect of her life. Yet, in two-and-a-half years everything was transformed.. Learned not to settle for less.	4.52

services are free to you. We help with employment, housing... rental assistance, vouchers, GED.”

Personal success stories garnered mixed reactions, with some participants finding them unbelievable or unlike their own experienced. One woman from the mixed race group found the stories appealing, stating:

[I liked] the stories of the people, just success stories Just how they explained where they were before they did the program and about where they were.

On the other hand, a Caucasian woman found the stories unappealing, explaining:

I don't care to hear somebody's story because we all have our own stories, we're in a situation because something happened in our lives. We need to change that. We don't care what somebody else needs to do.

For Some, Emotional Support Is A Necessary, But Not Sufficient, Component

Some women look for guidance and emotional support to help achieve their goals. Because they are self-reliant, they would like a program---or even a counselor— that provides motivation and encouragement as they move forward.

One Latina explained the support system she looks for in a program:

Walk me through where I want to be. Walk me through the steps of what I need to do. Give me exactly the sources, the income, the assistance that I need to bring this up from the floor and make it real. Help me visualize it.

An African American woman believed single mothers need support:

Helping single mothers accomplish goals by motivating them to do their best and helping them by any means necessary to survive.

A Latina expressed her desire for a personal counselor:

My organization would help everyone with their financial means whether it's extra money to pay for groceries or what-not, help people find good jobs... and have a counselor to help you. A counselor that is there for you.

The terms “supportive,” “motivating,” and “inspiring” captured the emotional components of assistance programs. When asked to describe their ideal programs, these words were found to be appealing and ranked near the top of the list.

Conversely, terms like “tough love” and “tough-minded friend” were seen as unappealing. They elicited strong negative reactions from participants and were seen

as contradictory to asking for help. As one Caucasian woman declared, “I think tough love is crap. When you need help, you don’t need to be judged and pushed like that.”

Building on the appeal of “supportive” and “motivating,” language that encourages and empowers women to achieve their personal goals was most persuasive. When asked to circle words or phrases believed to be convincing, those with an emotional component resonated with participants.

<u><i>Supportive</i></u>	<u><i>Motivating</i></u>	<u><i>Inspiring</i></u>
<p>Everybody needs support regardless of how strong people think or believe that they are. Everybody needs a foundation. That’s usually where support comes from. – <i>African American Female</i></p> <p>I just don’t want them to help me financially but be supportive in a way like advising, being a counselor or someone to talk to, someone to turn to. –<i>Caucasian Female</i></p>	<p>Motivating, I think, individually is most important depending on the career path. I think that’s very important to motivate me. – <i>Caucasian Female</i></p> <p>Motivating because the organization can motivate you to want to go back to school, to give you that help and just be independent... and live comfortably. –<i>Caucasian Female</i></p>	<p>Inspiring for the first one because I would like to inspire more people to learn different things and once a person is inspired there is no limit. –Mixed Race Group Female</p> <p>If I ask somebody to inspire me, that helps, especially if you see somebody that’s good and is making them successful. –<i>African American Female</i></p>

Persuasive phrases included:

- “Women take responsibility for setting their own goals”
- “Working women achieve their personal goals”
- “Learned not to settle for less”
- “Working women are not judged, they are supported”
- “Working women on the path to greater success”
- “The biggest single predictor of success is motivation!”
- “Empower working women”

Several participants invoked emotional and empathetic appeals when convincing others to participate. In their own words, they encouraged others to seek help during tough times and to use programs for emotional support.

One woman from the mixed race group wrote:

Times can be rough but rough times can be also be temporary. See yourself through by coming to a workshop on how to better your times ahead.

Another participant from the same group wrote:

Are you hurting? Discouraged, scared, lonely – call us. Let us know you want our help.

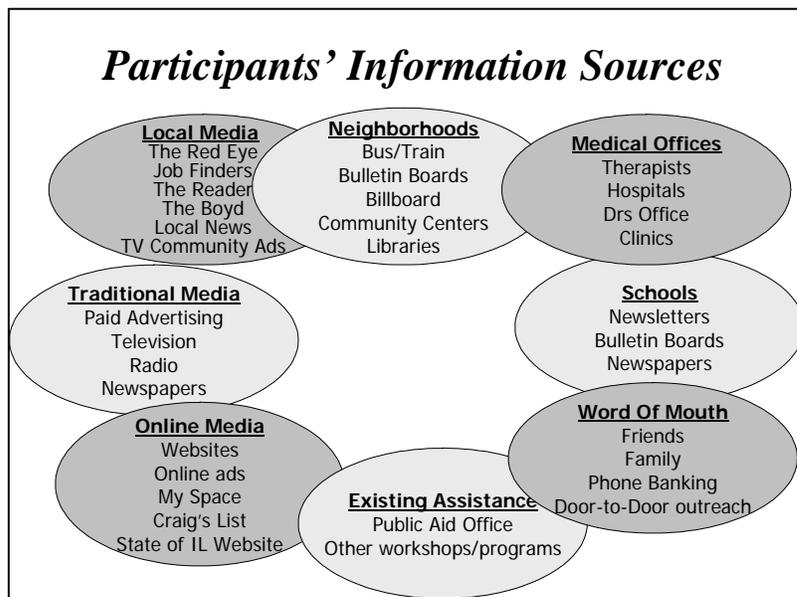
Emotional components may be necessary to some participants, but alone, do not build the foundation of assistance programs. It can help working women stay motivated and act as positive reinforcement and encouragement for their goals. One Latina summed it up best by saying, “If you can help me become a better person, then I know what I have to do.”

How Can We Communicate Most Efficiently?

Reach Out More Broadly

The single most important approach to increasing participation is to increase awareness. Rather than choosing between competing programs, most women are unaware of any of these opportunities. In fact, the content of the message (within reason) is substantially less important than simply generating awareness of the opportunities that are available.

We can get information to participants through a variety of channels, including the web, mass media, word of mouth, and community offices. Although traditional forms of mass media—television, radio, newspapers, and paid advertising—were most popular, a number of participants regularly consult local outlets rooted in their communities. Free neighborhood newspapers, like *The Red Eye*, *The Reader*, and job finders were mentioned, as well as local TV newscasts and community TV stations.



Participants acknowledge they read bulletins and signs posted in their neighborhoods, community centers, libraries, and on transit lines. Word of mouth also played a prominent role of how participants received their information—there is no substitute for trusted information from family and friends.

Tap Into Existing Parenting Networks

Participants' children—one of the most central parts of their lives—provide a link to a broader information network. Other parents, whether family, friends, or those at their

children's school, serve as a frequent source of information. Participants also focus their attention on newsletters and handouts from school.

One Caucasian woman cited her relationship with other parents:

Mothers definitely, and I talk to people in some of the playgroups that I bring my daughter to.

“They have postings at the school for programs for kids and for moms, so they have a bulletin board where they post stuff.” –Caucasian Female

“At my son's school, they have Christmas programs. They let you know about stuff for people.” – Caucasian Female

“One thing I do look through is my kid's handouts from school.” – African American Female

Health Service Professionals Provided Trusted Advice To Members Of Our Target Community:

Trusted experts who serve the community may also become informal information sources. Doctors, nurses and social workers have built personal relationships with individual women and they are trusted guides.

One woman from the mixed race group recalled:

When I had my daughter the social worker came and said “Okay, well you know you are just out of high school and you're not going to have a job right away, so here go to this office and get your food stamps. Go to this office and get your medical insurance.”

Another woman from the same group described:

I have a doctor that I just love. She is wonderful. She asks me about stuff when I come back: So how is it going with this you know personal stuff that I tell her about.

Use The Internet

Nearly all participants are online and are familiar with searching for information on the web. Only one woman in all four focus groups had little or no experience with the Internet. Online media including websites, web ads, Craig's list, and MySpace were all mentioned by participants as information sources. This should not be surprising as over half of those with incomes under \$30,000 use the web. Since internet use is much lower among older and rural people, Eleanor's target group is even more likely to be connected.

“MySpace...A lot of people on that...Put a little ad... They start their own site on MySpace and invite people.” –African American Females

“The state's website has a lot of different things about help for all different types of things.” –African American Female

Conclusion

Fortunately, you have a target audience eager to receive your services. They do not need to be persuaded that they can or should receive help. Rather, the biggest hurdles are finding these women and persuading them that your grantees want to help *them--* “working” women, specifically; that you will provide educational programs or services that help them *invest in themselves*; and that completing these programs will help them better *provide for their children*.

Communicating with these women through trusted networks is essential: tapping into informal, existing relationships among parents, teachers, or medical professionals is key. Developing an internet presence, with straightforward information about how to apply and qualify, can address some information gaps. Paid media, like television and radio, are necessary foundations to building word of mouth. Finally, neighborhood publications can also help build awareness.

In short, the Eleanor Foundation’s grantees are in the enviable position of offering a valued service to an eager audience; the Eleanor Foundation has the important opportunity to augment their grantees’ efficacy by increasing “Eleanor women’s” awareness of available services.

To this end, communications should:

1. Reach out more broadly using school, healthcare and social networks, and possibly community organizers, as well as paid internet and community media
2. Use children to motivate women to change their lives (through participation in programs)
3. Focus on educational components, where appropriate
4. Mix individual and emotional success stories with concrete information about goals and methods
5. Make qualification criteria simple and clear, putting them up front, where possible
6. Use visual cues to make the types of women served evident
7. Describe potential clients as "working"
8. Address structural barriers like children and transportation, in introductory communications as well as in program offerings
9. Understand the severe time pressures these women face and the impact of unforeseen emergencies

Communications should not:

- 1. Use class-based or sociological terms (like "poor" or "at-risk") to describe clients**
- 2. Use demeaning terms (like tough love) to describe programs**
- 3. Assume anyone is familiar with any particular program**
- 4. Require potential clients to invest too much time in determining whether they qualify for the program**