Promoting Physical Activity in Community Settings

A Strategy Formation Workbook for the Lexington Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition

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I. **Purpose of Workbook:** The purpose of this workbook is to help the Kentucky Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition develop a marketing plan to promote physical activity among tweens (9 to 13 year olds) in community settings in Lexington, Kentucky. This workbook presents a mixture of local focus group data and national data.

II. **Audience Segmentation:** A desire to be accepted by peers is of key importance in understanding tween motivations. The tween years are seen as a time for discovering one's talents and mastering new skills. Tweens can be divided into groups by degree of involvement, age, and gender.

III. **Product Strategy:** Tweens are highly motivated to physical activity by the ability to spend time with friends, to engage in new and various activities, and to participate in activities they deem “fun” or “adventurous”. Additional motivating factors for tweens include time spent with family, ability to exhibit self-expression, increased energy, and improved appearance. Long-term benefits of physical activity are not motivating factors to tweens.

IV. **The Competition:** Screen time is commonly perceived as a barrier to physical activity. National data suggests that there is no direct link between the two. Lexington data shows that tweens see peers who participate in too much TV, video game, or computer use as “lazy” and more common among those who are more sedentary.

V. **Pricing Strategy:** To tweens, the major cost of physical activity is fear of embarrassment in front of one’s peers. The competitive nature of athletics during the tween years exacerbates this problem. Financial costs of physical activity, along with competing demands (predominantly over time and school work) are other major costs associated with physical activity for tweens.

VI. **Other Key Factors that Must Be Addressed:** Research shows that other factors believed to influence physical activity among tweens include access to facilities and opportunities to be physically active, safety, and transportation. Parental influence and physical ability also influence tweens’ physical activity levels.

VII. **Placement Strategy:** According to the focus groups, most tween physical activity in Lexington takes place at school and near the home. Other activity sources include non-school athletics (i.e. cheerleading, dance, horses, sports camps), community organizations
(i.e. YMCA, Parks and Recreation, 4-H, Girl Scouts), churches (several were mentioned, providing varying opportunities for activity at no or low cost), and community attractions (i.e. The Stadium, Lexington Rocks, Champs).

**VIII. Partners**: Parents have a major influence on their children during the tween years. Parents employ a variety of means of encouraging tween physical activity, including role modeling, participating in physical activity alongside their children, encouraging their children to find new activities, requiring activity, offering praise and recognition, encouraging play with friends, and/or providing transportation. It is known that forcing physical activity upon tweens dampens their enthusiasm. Parents are motivated to encourage tween physical activity in their belief that it will help their children feel better about themselves and keep them away from negative influences, provide life lessons, and allow for better family communication. Major parental barriers to encouraging tween physical activity include competing demands for time, financial costs, perceived difficulties influencing tweens, and, for some, an inability to role model physical activity.

Tweens also listen to their teachers, coaches, religious leaders and other adults (PortiCO Research, 2000). In the Lexington research, coaches were the most frequently-mentioned sources of influence regarding physical activity (other than parents). It is important to remember peers in any list of tween influencers.

**IX. Promotional Strategy**: Tweens respond best to messages that depict individuals their age or slightly older, and that help them find activities at which they can excel. “Fun” and variety are important components of tween promotional efforts, while authoritative tones should not be used. Tweens are heavy users of television, radio, and computers.

**X. VERB Summer Scorecard Overview**: The program was largely seen as positive in focus groups, though promotion and distribution should be improved. Early focus groups were used, in part, to design the program. Tweens were impressed by the variety of activities included in the program, and were similarly impressed by the prizes available. Major program barriers included competitive time demands and transportation issues. The program reached a diverse group of tweens, and was most popular with tweens from 9-11 years of age. 355 individuals turned in Scorecards at or before the Grand Finale event, which was attended by over 1000 individuals.
Physical activity offers young people a host of benefits. Even moderate physical activity improves health and protects against overweight in childhood and later in life (Hill, Wyatt, Reed and Peters, 2003). In addition to its role in regulating energy balance, physical activity lowers blood pressure, improves cholesterol and glucose levels, enhances heart and lung function, builds strong bones, and improves emotional well-being in youth (Strauss, Rodzilsky, Burack and Colin, 2001; Sothern, Loftin, Suskind, et al., 1999). Moderate physical activity improves young people’s self-esteem and body image, reduces depression and anxiety, helps them sleep well, and improves their academic performance (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Perhaps most importantly, active children become active adults who continue to benefit throughout their life times from activity’s powerful protective effects against heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, and other chronic conditions (Telama, Yang, Lasskso, Viikari, 1997). Despite these benefits, many youth in Kentucky fail to meet recommended physical activity guidelines – a total of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous per day (Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2000; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).

**About this Workbook**

The purpose of this workbook is to help the Kentucky Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition develop a marketing plan to promote physical activity among tweens (9 to 13 year olds) in community settings in Lexington, Kentucky. Research is the bedrock of any marketing plan, and therefore, this report summarizes information on tweens, their perceptions of physical activity, and factors that influence their activity levels that will be useful to coalition members in making evidence-based decisions. The information reported here is based on the following data sources:

- Research commissioned by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) VERB™
- Other published research reports
Marketing research conducted with tweens and their parents in Fayette County by the Lexington Fayette County Health Department. Kentucky research includes 27 focus group interviews conducted with tweens, 24 group interviews conducted with parents.

Results of an evaluation of the VERB™ Summer Scorecard pilot project implemented during summer of 2004. [See Appendix A for a more detailed description of the research methods used to collect information in Fayette County.]

This workbook is organized into seven sections that correspond with key components of a marketing plan:

- **Audience Segmentation**: Target audience characteristics
- **Product Strategy**: Tween and parental perceptions of physical activity’s benefits
- **The Competition**: Tween and parental perceptions of activities that compete with physical activity
- **Pricing Strategy**: Tween and parental perceptions of the psychological, social and financial costs of being physically active
- **Other Key Factors that Must Be Addressed**: Other factors believed to influence physical activity among tweens
- **Placement Strategy**: Potential activity outlets, distribution channels, and program partners
- **Promotional Strategy**: Recommendations for promoting physical activity among tweens

Marketing questions are placed at the end of each section, along with a list of research highlights to guide discussion as the coalition develops each component of the marketing plan.
Social marketers are committed to understanding everything they can about their consumers – the people they hope to reach. In understanding tweens, it is important that we explore the developmental characteristics of the tween years, ages 9 to 13, and the motivating or driving forces in their lives.

**General Characteristics**

In an extensive review of the literature, Aeffect, Inc. (2000) found that, despite rapid developmental changes and a fragile self-esteem, the tween years are a positive, optimistic phase of life. During these years, tweens are developing their self-identity and seeking ways to define and express themselves. They fantasize about being rich, famous, and successful, and seek ways to express their individuality. Distinctive social needs and desires for tweens are: belonging, mastering new skills, gaining a sense of power and freedom, and having fun.

- **Being accepted by peers** is one of the primary motivations during this time. Tweens want to be popular and prefer “hanging out with friends” to all other activities, including watching television and playing video games. Friends have a major impact on their emerging self image. Because they look to peers for approval, tweens have a deep fear of humiliation. Peer influence was the single most commonly-mentioned impetus for activity in the Lexington focus groups.

- Despite attempts to become independent, tweens also have a profound need for unconditional love, support, and guidance from parents. Perceived parental expectations are important and prevent many tweens from engaging in risky behaviors, such as drinking and smoking.

- The tween years also are time for mastering new skills. Tweens need acceptance, a sense of control, and opportunities to discover their talents.

- Tweens are exploring freedom and independence in complex ways. They are developing a sense of control and enjoy the power of making their own choices. They like to influence adults and enjoy freedom. Although interested in learning the rules, tweens also begin to question authority. They need
opportunities to make small decisions and try new things, while still being able to rely on parents to make big decisions.

- Tweens also like to have fun. Never underestimate their desire to be silly and frivolous. They especially like to “gross out” adults and play with friends.

Segments in the Tween Population

Social marketers recognize that it is not possible to be “all things to all people” and attempt to identify subgroups or segments in the consumer population that share needs, wants, and values that make them likely to respond to public health interventions similarly. Differences within the tween population that should be considered in designing programs to promote physical activity include: their degree of involvement in activities outside the home, age, and gender. By understanding these differences, it is possible to select specific segments to receive special attention and increase program effectiveness and efficiency by tailoring strategies to address their special needs and wants.

Degree of Involvement

CDC’s VERB™ program identified important differences within this population based on the degree to which tweens are mentally and physically involved in activities outside the home (PortiCo Research, 2002; Affect, Inc. 2001b). Four subgroups were identified:

- **Superstars**: These tweens are highly involved in activities and feel passionate about being involved in activities. Tweens in this segment have goals and are committed to doing their best in achieving them. Their parents support and encourage their participation in multiple activities. They typically live in safe communities with a wealth of resources at their disposal.

- **Moderately involved tweens** who are involved but not yet passionate about any of the activities in which they participate. The majority of tweens in this segment is in a period of discovery and exploration. They are still searching for something they find rewarding.

- **Passives** are uninvolved tweens who do things mostly out of boredom rather than interest. Tweens in this segment often lack clear goals and have not experienced successes from which to derive
confidence. They do not have a specific activity they enjoy or feel passionate about. They often lack parental support for participating in outside activities.

- **High risk tweens** who generally are constrained by poverty and typically live with a single parent in an economically depressed neighborhood. Their families face numerous challenges that prevent their children from participating in activities outside the home and school. They have few options or exposure to activities and must overcome numerous barriers to become involved.

**Age**

Significant changes in physical and emotional maturation take place during the tween years, creating important differences between younger and older tweens. Younger tweens (9 to 11 years of age) have an increasing need to be recognized as individuals. They look to peers for validation and advice, but also respond to family encouragement and attention, e.g., when parents or other relatives attend games they play. In contrast, as tweens enter middle school, they begin to feel more self-conscious as they begin to compare themselves to teenagers. They admire teenage role models and spokespersons in the media and begin to watch television shows and read magazines geared to teens (Affect, Inc., 2000). Lexington tweens, for instance, recommended high school celebrities (talented athletes and student leaders from local schools) as the best spokespersons for new programs aimed at increasing physical activity and nutrition. Finally, the Lexington research found that older tweens are at times reticent to participate in activities with younger tweens (preferring instead to hang out with peers their own age or older). These preferences conflict with those of some parents who prefer activities that encompass a broader age range and can accommodate all children in the family.

**Gender**

There are also major differences between girls and boys (PortiCo Research, 2002). Girls tend to be more concerned about being with friends and place a strong value on beauty and glamour. Less emphasis is placed on getting girls to be physically active and they are usually given fewer options than boys. They also may shy away from activities that they view as too competitive. For instance, in Lexington, research found that popular activities for girls, such as dance, are among the most competitive to join. In contrast, boys are expected to be athletic and are encouraged to get outside to play. Relationships with friends carry less emotional weight for boys than girls, but they are still compelled to feel part of a group (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). Boys are motivated by messages that express power, bravery and “good versus evil” (Affect, Inc., 2000).
Marketing Questions

Which segments of the tween population should be given the greatest priority in designing program interventions?
In a social marketing plan, the ‘product’ refers to the behavior being promoted – regular physical activity. To be marketed successfully, social marketers believe the product must provide a solution to problems that consumers consider important and/or offer them benefits they truly want. Therefore, the goal of the product strategy is to identify product benefits that best meet tweens’ needs and aspirations. In this section, therefore, we outline the factors that are most important to tweens and their perceptions of physical activity’s benefits. These include: spending time with friends, having fun, learning or improving skills, self expression, improving appearance, and to a lesser extent, increasing energy and fitness.

- **Spending Time with Friends**
  As mentioned previously, the tween years are marked by the need for belonging and acceptance by peers. Having friends and being a friend to others is an important source of happiness (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). Tweens enjoy activities that allow them to interact socially with peers, make friends, and spend time with them. In fact, “hanging out with friends” is one of the activities tweens value most. Participating in activities with friends is especially important for girls, making the chance to socialize just as valuable as the activity itself (PortiCo, 2002). Not surprisingly being able to spend time with friends was the physical activity benefit mentioned most often by tweens in focus groups conducted in Lexington as well as other locales around the country.

  Well, you can exercise, and you get to have fun with your friends, and you can just see about how fast you can go. (Lexington tween discussing a favorite activity - relay races)

  Then if they want to go do something and their friends won’t go do it with them… they don’t do it. (Lexington tween)
• **Spending Time with Family Members**

Tweens also value time they spend with their families. In Lexington focus groups, some spoke proudly of times they have gone on walks, bike rides, or other outings with their parents. They posited that less physically active kids are less likely to have parents who value physical activity – a hypothesis confirmed in national studies (Michael Cohen Group, 2003).

Lexington focus groups revealed the strong role of family in encouraging physical activity for many tweens. Tweens with similarly-aged siblings often counted them as their most common partners in physical activity. Lexington tweens also mentioned time spent being active with their parents (walking, swimming and bike riding were most common) in a typically positive light.

• **Fun and Enjoyment**

Tweens enjoy activities they consider fun and exciting. Because they experience a great deal of pressure to do well at school and many have very busy schedules, they look for ways to relax and have fun during their leisure time.

> *I love to play baseball, and it’s even more fun when I play with my best friends. To me a good time is when you get together with your friends and have fun. That’s exactly what my friends and I do. We have so much fun together, we joke around and have a great time. We don’t like competition if we’re not in a league.”* (National focus group participant in Aeffect, Inc. study)

> *It’s fun…and a lot of your friends will be doing it.* (Lexington tween discussing benefits of physical activity)

• **Excitement**

Tweens are generally excited about trying new activities. They are naturally curious and stimulated by a sense of discovery, challenge and exploration (Aeffect, Inc., 2001a). But they must balance the thrill of new adventures with a need for comfort that comes with doing things that are familiar (Michael Cohen Group, 2003).

• **Mastering New Skills and Sense of Achievement**

Tweens want to improve themselves and discover their talents (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). Mastering new skills are important ways they develop a sense of competence and control in their lives. As their abilities increase they enjoy a sense of accomplishment from having helped their team or
reaching individual milestones (Aeffect, 2001a). By allowing them to select the activities they enjoy doing, they also get an opportunity to exert control and gain a sense of achievement. Many tweens have a strong desire to engage in self-directed activities. Moderately and highly involved tweens enjoy activities they find challenging and physically demanding. In contrast, high risk and low involvement tweens need opportunities to engage in activities that seem relatively easy to master (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). Perhaps importantly, some parents in the Lexington focus groups noted that they are experiencing difficulty in knowing what activities their tweens are most interested in.

- **Self expression and recognition**
  Tweens seek ways to express themselves and like to be recognized for their achievements and individuality. The process of choosing an activity is one way for them to express themselves.

- **Appearance**
  Most tweens know that physical activity can improve their appearance – an increasingly important feature of their lives as they grow older. Girls in particular feel it is important to look good and control their weight, while boys want to appear more muscular (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). This benefit was not mentioned frequently in the Lexington focus groups.

- **Fitness**
  Tweens know that physical activity will make them more fit. Tweens in Lexington defined fitness in a variety of ways, ranging from “not overweight” to being able to do well in sports. The benefits they mentioned most often were increased strength and endurance.

- **Energy and other health benefits**
  Tweens also know that physical activity can boost energy as well as release stored up “hyper energy”. But they do not appear to apply this knowledge; they tend to engage in sedentary activities when feeling tired (Michael Cohen Research Group, 2003). In Lexington, tweens told us that physical activity can improve immune response, increase longevity, control weight, and boost energy.

- Long term health benefits are not appealing benefits for tweens or their parents. Many children do not have the ability to think abstractly enough to comprehend the long-term benefits of activity (Michael Cohen Group, 2003).
Marketing Questions

Which benefits do tweens value most?
Part III: The Competition

Because consumers always have choices, it is important to consider how the competition influences health behavior. In social marketing, competition refers to the behavioral options that compete with public health recommendations and services, i.e., activities that compete for tweens’ time. Time constraints imposed by school work, conflicting interests (e.g., extra curricular school activities), families’ activities, television viewing, video games, and time spent on the computer have been cited by youth as the major reason they are not physically active (Allison, Dwyer and Makin, 1999). However, studies examining the relationship between these activities and physical activity levels suggest that they are not in direct competition. Rather, it appears some tweens manage their time better than others.

Among competing leisure time pursuits, television viewing has received the greatest attention for two reasons: (1) it represents the greatest single source of physical inactivity among youth except sleep (Dietz and Strasburger, 1991); and (2) time spent watching television has been linked to obesity in some, but not all, studies (Lowry, Wechsler, Galuska, Fulton and Kann, 2002). Surprisingly, studies have not found a strong relationship between physical activity levels and the amount of time spent watching television and playing video games (Strauss, Rodzilsky, Burack and Michelle, 2001; Feldman, 2003) and suggest the reduction of television watching is not an effective method for promoting physical activity (Robinson, Hammer, Killen, Kraemer, Wilson, Hayward, and Taylor, 1993; Lowry, Wechsler, Galuska, Fulton and Kann, 2002). Whereas interventions that decrease television watching have been shown to reduce obesity among adolescent girls and middle school boys (Robinson, 1999; Gortmaker, Peterson, Wiecha, et al., 1999), this appears to be due to reduced exposure to advertisements for high fat, sugary foods and subsequent dietary changes rather than increased physical activity.

In contrast to television and video viewing, more positive sedentary activities - reading, doing homework, and using the computer – are actually associated with increased physical activity and better dietary practices (Utter, Neumark-Sztainer, Jeffery, and Story, 2003). Therefore, screen time does not appear to compete directly with physical activity; and, although efforts to decrease the time spent watching television or
playing video games may reduce obesity rates, the reduction of screen time is not a necessary nor particularly effective way to get tweens more physically active.

While the Lexington focus groups were not designed to empirically link screen time to physical activity rates, they did reveal the perception among some tweens that “excessive” television viewing, video game play, and internet use (“excessive” is variously defined) is more common among their more sedentary peers. Another potentially competing activity mentioned by Lexington tweens is telephone use.

Marketing Questions

Which benefits best distinguish physical activity from its competition?
In social marketing, price refers to the psychological, social, and financial costs that consumers exchange for product benefits. The goal of the pricing strategy is to identify the costs of being physically active and develop ways to make those costs more affordable for tweens and their families. The major costs identified by tweens in Lexington and elsewhere are:

- **Fear of failure or embarrassment**
  During the tween years, youth want to avoid embarrassing situations at all costs and need reassurance that no one is judging them (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). In national studies, many tweens voiced fears that they would be teased or feel embarrassed (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). Tweens who are overweight, uncoordinated, or unsure of their abilities are especially reluctant to be physically active in front of peers who might tease or ridicule them. In Lexington, some tweens told us that they thought sedentary youth were afraid of being judged by their peers: *Maybe (they are inactive because they are afraid of) being criticized by teammates or other people doing it with them, saying that they weren’t very good.* (Lexington tween discussing a barrier to physical activity)

- **Monetary costs**
  Financial constraints deter many tweens from participating in organized sports or other structured activities. Finding free or very low cost activities is especially important for those in the high-risk segment. In focus groups conducted nationally, many children expressed sadness that they could not
afford to participate in organized activities or programs (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). In Lexington, parents expressed this concern more commonly than did tweens. In particular, they complained that local activities, especially retail facilities, are too expensive.

- **Competitive nature of most programs for middle schoolers**

  Many tweens stop being physically active because they cannot compete successfully for one of the limited spots on a sports team. This competition is typically new in a tween’s progression from elementary to middle school, and thus requires some adjustment. For this reason, Lexington tweens revealed that more inclusive activities, such as the intramural activities offered at some local middle schools and middle school track (which generally accepts large numbers of athletes, and thus is less competitive at the middle school level) are the most popular. Parents, tweens, and a Lexington middle school principal all note that some sports, particularly dance, for middle schoolers are overwhelmed with willing participants for a comparatively small squad, while other sports, i.e. football, are apparently “begging” youth to try out. (Some middle school principals note the difficulties involved in staffing larger, more inclusive teams and intramurals. However, not all Lexington middle schools take advantage of the small amount of intramural funding offered by the school board.) Community businesses and agencies provide additional outlets for physical activity, though these activities typically require transportation and present some financial burden. Further, tweens seem more likely to participate in school related activities as these activities attract more of their peers.

- **Inconvenience of messing up hair and make up (among girls)**

  Research with African American and Hispanic girls found that they avoided being physically active because it would mess up their make-up and hair (Leslie, 1999). This barrier was not mentioned in the Lexington focus groups.

- **Competing demands**

  A reason many tweens mentioned for not being more active is pressure from school work and other competing activities. Homework, family activities, television, instant messaging, and video playing were mentioned frequently by Lexington tweens as well as elsewhere (Prospect Associates, 1998). However, as mentioned above, other studies suggest that these activities can co-exist with being physically active.
Marketing Questions

How can we reduce the costs of being physically active for tweens and their families?
In addition to costs that must be exchanged for product benefits, the social marketing plan must address other factors that influence tweens’ physical activity levels. The most important of these are: access to facilities and opportunities to be physically active, safety, and transportation.

- **Access to facilities and opportunities to be physically active**
  Lack of access to play spaces, organized activities, and play equipment also deter some tweens from being more active (Kohl and Hobbs, 1998; Robinson, 1999). Some tweens do not know where to go to find outlets for physical activity. (Michael Cohen Group, 2003). Lexington tweens were generally aware of available locations for physical activity, as were their parents. Tweens and parents alike at times lamented a lack of organized activities at convenient times (out of conflict with family/job schedules) and locations (close to home or, in some cases, accessible by LexTran).

- **Lack of safe places to play with supervision**
  Parents place a high priority on safety. In some rough neighborhoods, even when parks or other facilities are close, parents are reluctant to let their children participate for fear of what they might encounter. Even in “safer” neighborhoods, parents are fearful of allowing their children outside after dark and may restrict them from playing where they cannot be supervised (PortiCo Research, 2002). Girls, in particular, mention safety as barriers to physical activity (Prospect Associates, 1998). Not surprisingly, the Lexington research found that parents discussed safety concerns more than children.

- **Lack of transportation**
  A factor closely tied to accessibility is lack of transportation. Many tweens are not involved in activities because they do not have transportation to the facility or back home. To reach high-risk kids, whose parents’ work schedules often prevent them from transporting their children to activities, this
barrier is especially daunting (PortiCo Research, 2002). Transportation was one of the most commonly-cited barriers to physical activity in the Lexington research, mentioned often by tweens and parents alike. After-school activities and transportation for community events (i.e. camps, lessons, Summer Scorecard events) were suggested by the tweens and parents. LexTran busing is an option utilized by some tweens at the encouragement of their parents, while other parents expressed concern about their children traveling alone.

She wanted to participate in some of the events at school, but I’ll be honest: With my work schedule, I’m not sure how we would work in the all of the things that you need to get them to and from the practices, because both my husband and I work (Lexington parent).

- **Parental influences**
  Lack of support from parents is a major reason some tweens, especially those in the passive and high-risk segments, are not physically active. Parents are cited as a major source of information and encouragement as well as transportation and financial resources needed to participate in structured programs (Prospect Associates, 1998). Because they play such an important role in their children’s lives, parents’ perceptions of physical activity are discussed in the Partners Section of the Placement Strategy.

- **Personality characteristics**
  Shyness and poor self esteem combined with fear of embarrassment deter some tweens from participation in physical activity (Michael Cohen Group, 2003; Aeffect Inc., 2001; Strauss, Rodzilsky, Burack, Colin, 2001; Ryan and Dzwaltowski; 2002).

- **Physical limitations**
  Asthma, extreme overweight, and other physical problems limit some tweens’ activity levels. Lexington tweens noted that illness, even temporary, at certain times (i.e. during tryouts) could make it difficult to participate for an extended time.
What can be done to address other factors that influence activity levels?
**Part VI: Placement Strategy**

*Place* refers to the distribution of goods and the location of sales and service encounters. In social marketing, place may be thought of as action outlets - where and when tweens can be physically active. Place includes the actual physical location of these outlets, operating hours, general attractiveness and comfort, and accessibility – e.g. parking, and availability by public transportation. It also includes partners or intermediaries – organizations and people – that can provide information, goods and services and perform other functions that facilitate the change process.

**Action Outlets**

A key element in developing this project’s placement strategy is identifying organizations that can be encouraged to provide opportunities for tweens to be active. Research conducted in Lexington identified a variety of places where tweens are physically active or would like to be. According to the focus groups, most tween physical activity in Lexington takes place at school and near the home. Other activity sources include churches (several were mentioned, providing varying opportunities for activity at no or low cost), non-school athletics (i.e. cheerleading, dance, horses, swimming, sports camps), community organizations (i.e. 4-H, Girl Scouts, Riding for the Handicapped), and community attractions (i.e. The Stadium, Lexington Rocks, Champs).

Neighborhoods are seen by many parents as great opportunities for tween physical activity, particularly if those activities are organized, thus avoiding safety concerns. A few focus groups included mention of specific organizational activities taking place in Fayette County neighborhoods:

*I think the neighborhood association sometimes, they can arrange a neighborhood basketball game or something like that, because a lot of people that...like even...we live in a cul-de-sac and we have a basketball goal that goes out on the street, and a lot of the neighborhood kids always come over and play.*

(Lexington parent)
Organizations mentioned by Lexington tweens that function as action outlets, and comments made about them are outlined below:

- **Parks and Recreation:** The Lexington-Fayette County Division of Parks and Recreation was frequently mentioned in the focus groups as a source of community physical activity. Matching, perhaps, the diversity of this agency’s offerings in the community, respondents offered a diversity of opinions about Parks and Recreation facilities, cost, and programming. Some individuals found the agency’s offerings to be limited and expensive, while others found them to be inexpensive with appropriate activities. (Some of the focus groups used in this analysis took place shortly after an announced closure of some area swimming pools, thus explaining some of the negative responses.) This inconsistency may be further rooted in the many representatives the agency has in the community (staff members, coaches, etc.), some of which are apparently more effective than others:

  Parks and Rec, the only thing is consistency on who is teaching the sport. Sometimes you get great, wonderful instructors, and sometimes it falls flat.

  We have parks in this neighborhood, but it seems like there’s never anything put on in the parks that’s free. Jacobson Park, I guess I can think of, the Friday Flicks….It is so packed. But if you did something maybe in every park on the same night, like a Bike Night on...in every park, but it’s free, but it’s an organized activity. But those would be things you could go to.

- **YMCA:** Respondents who were familiar with the local YMCA facilities were generally pleased. Cost and transportation, however, are an issue for some (other comments refer to their affordability and sliding payment/income scale). Some parents indicated their wish that child-friendly activities (such as the arcade) be opened in the morning, as well.

  They [respondent's children] really like it and I’m surprised. And they have their own... Like at the North Y, they have a whole row of different equipment that does different things, and they have their little favorites, for some reason, that they...they like to do. But they’ll ride the bike now, that’s the first thing they get on, and they’ll...they’ll ride it and then they’ll do their little reps of the other stuff.

- **Religious-based Institutions:** Several different local church programs for tweens were mentioned positively during the course of the focus groups. Many of these programs are free or low cost, though the amount of physical activity offered varies from league sports to youth meetings. (Northeast Christian, Centenary United Methodist, Central Baptist ROC, Immanuel Baptist, Southland Christian, Victory Baptist, Russell Cave Baptist, and Pleasant Green Baptist were specifically mentioned)
I go to Calvary Baptist and we have the ROC [Recreation Outreach Center], and it’s $4.00 a month for an Andrew Card, and most people that use it are not church members, and it’s really wonderful. (Lexington parent)

- Retail outlets
  - Tweens mentioned several of their favorite retail activity outlets in the community, including: The Stadium, Lexington Rocks, Champs Roller Skating, Kids Place, Martial Arts training facilities, Gymnastics and cheerleading academies, dance schools, Laser Quest, Lexington Children’s Theater, Lexington Tennis Club and bowling. Theme parks and skiing/snowboarding were frequently mention retail outlets outside of the community.
  - Some parents complained about the cost of these facilities

Marketing Questions

Which organizations should we encourage to offer opportunities for tweens to be physically active? What do we want these organizations to do – offer discounts, offer free activities, offer opportunities at specific times? How can we recruit and motivate these organizations?
Intermediaries, people who can influence tweens, are an important component of the placement strategy. During the tween years, parents have a major impact on what their children do. Teachers, coaches, religious leaders, and of course, peers, also influence tweens.

Parents

Research conducted by the VERB™ program (PortiCo Research, 2002; Affect 2001; Michael Cohen Group, 2003) suggests that most parents recognize that they provide the most important influence in their children’s lives. Like their counterparts nationwide, Lexington parents believe they have an important role in guiding and supporting their children; some consider it a parental responsibility to encourage and facilitate healthy behaviors like physical activity. In Lexington, as well as among parents studied in other locales (Center for Weight and Health, U.C. Berkeley, 2001: 35-6), parents are aware of a variety of strategies they can employ to make their children more active. Statements from Lexington parents are used to highlight these strategies below.

- Role modeling

  And also, about role modeling, I would add, children learn from behavior, emulating behavior of the parents, too, so… I, I don’t watch very much TV. If the parent is sitting there watching TV, then that kind of leads children to fall into that track.

  And exercising, my son sees his father exercise every morning when he’s home, and he’ll exercise with him, he’ll do sit-ups and push-ups and… But because he sees him do that, he does them with him. So, I think seeing what you do.

  Well, if I want it for them, I need to want it for myself, as well. And if they need to change, it’s so do I, because they are what I’ve modeled to them.

Lexington parents consider it a parental responsibility to encourage and facilitate healthy behaviors like physical activity.
But they see me staying involved in the things I like, and it’s not exercising, it’s not running, it’s not the treadmill. It’s…it’s different types of things, even if it’s out landscaping or something. But I’m doing things that I enjoy, and that’s what I try.

- Playing with their children and teaching them new games

When the boys were with my mother, she bought them a badminton set, and she actually got outside, her and her boyfriend and the two boys, and played badminton, and it really surprised me when they came back and said, “Mom, Granny bought us a badminton set,” because my mother is probably the least active person around. But she actually got outside in the back yard with them and played badminton. From what they told me, they had a ball. And I wouldn’t have thought to buy that. That just wouldn’t have crossed my mind. But they said they had the best time, part of it being with their Granny, but still, being…that was something different that they had learned to play.

I think they genuinely want you involved because … they want that time with you, ….And it …can be 30 minutes or it can be 2 hours; it doesn’t have to be a long time. But just to know that there’s a little quality time, maybe every day, maybe just on the weekends, if they …. Because they’re going to get to do it with you….

A couple of weeks ago, I taught my grandkids to play two-square; they had never played before. So now, all the kids in the neighborhood come over every day.

And she really is craving… a lot of time with Mom. And, I used to walk a lot, and so, I said, “Let’s just start walking together. We don’t have to run.” Running is hard if you’re not used to running, and she’s not cardiovascular at all. And so, I’m trying to find a way to get her up and get her out and spend time with her without sending her…she’s right at that age where she could get the wrong message really easily.

- Sparking interest and helping them find an activity they enjoy.

Then they’re like, all of a sudden, mine is not active in the last year or so from what she used to be the first nine years. So, it’s hard for me to know what to do to keep her walking, unless there’s a cell phone at the end of the street, she’d walk and get it. (LAUGHTER) Or there’s a pretty boy around the block, she would walk. (LAUGHTER) But, no, I don’t have no clue how to get her physically active.
Well, encourage them to try new things. Because sometimes they may not feel like they’re athletic. My daughter was not sure about playing volleyball, and I said, “Well, just go try, and if you like it, you can play and if you don’t like it, you don’t have to, but at least you have the opportunity to see if maybe it’s something you do like.”

Some Lexington parents recommend exposing tweens to lots of different activities so they can discover what they enjoy doing.

Parent 1: …(give them) a variety of exposures, different options, and … opportunities to try something then try something else. Because it’s true, they may think, “Oh, I’m just a basketball player,” but if they were given the option to swim, dive or something, that they maybe would not or they might think, “Oh, I like this, too.”

Parent 2: And then they wouldn’t be forced to do something they were terrible at and get teased, either. They could choose what they felt confident with, after they’ve had an experience with whatever it was.

Some parents realize their children are not talented enough to make the school team and encourage their children to find some other type of activity. They wish the schools or other organizations would offer walking clubs, non-competitive sports or other activities.

I find myself with a daughter who is not athletic, just can’t run …. Didn’t join the swim team because she just… didn’t want to deal with the competitiveness. And so, I am trying to find ways to get her up off her rump and active…

And when they get a certain age, even though they shouldn’t be able to say no, but they don’t want to do it. And then, sixth, seventh, eighth grade is the perfect time, to where they end up gaining weight, because they don’t want to, they don’t have fun playing ball, maybe they’re not as good.
- Developing a plan, such as a schedule, and establishing rules that require them to spend time being active. Some parents require their children to mow the lawn, walk the dog, or do other chores that keep them physically active.

> From where I’m sitting, I need to... really take a look at it and analyze it and see what needs to be done, then think about it and have a plan. Just the whole thing of being intentional and proactive about it is what I need to do. Yeah, to recognize that it is an issue and that it is maybe a problem, and then figure out what to do about it.

> If I fuss at her long enough, she’ll get on her bike, go down to the park and ride. And then she’ll find someone to play with on the playground, it never fails. Even 11 years old, there’s kids down there playing on the playground.

- Offering praise and recognition

> Well, also, positive reinforcement. Like my son, he likes to run, and when he does those things, I tell him that he’ll have good strong bones and muscles and heart and lungs. So consistently, I never miss that opportunity. I’m not pressuring, just reinforcing him, that he’s doing it because he enjoys it anyhow, and the additional benefit he will reap the rest of his life, I kind of say those things.

- Getting them to play with friends

> Get a friend to do it with them. .... I think as long as they are with a partner, that encourages them.

> I think one of the obstacles I find is, like I said, we don’t have a lot of children in the neighborhood, so you have to make a play date.
• Providing transportation, buying equipment and other resources needed to participate in sports and other forms of physical activity.

I think to get kids to be physically fit, buying activities, buying toys, just like balls, that you would do outside, instead of, I’m not buying one video game this…this summer. I bought balls, I bought jump ropes, hula hoops, different types of things that would keep them outside.

With the transportation, my kids go to the teen center, and they provide transportation and they go swimming or then they…they do a different activity every day, and they… They have vans that take them, and they provide that transportation, because you’ve got the parents who work during the day who…or who don’t have a car or whatever, they couldn’t take them. So, this way, they do get to do that. There’s those community resources around that’s able to do that.

She needs to have a good support system, get Grandmother or friends from church to help with the shuttling and what’s needed to be done.

Parents can also damper children’s enthusiasm by forcing them to try activities they cannot do well and by yelling and nagging at them. Forcing children to exercise during preadolescence appears to have a negative impact on their activity levels later in life (Taylor, 1999).

They need support and not pressure.

We’ve walked that tightrope between supporting effort and no pressure.

Parents’ perceptions of product benefits

Education, learning, and professional success are the most important aspirations they hold for their children (Aeffect, Inc. 2001). Parents want to teach their children good values, help them discover their talents, make good choices in life, and have fun. Parents view physical activity as a positive diversion for their children and many have made personal sacrifices to help their children become more active. The benefits they consider most important are:

• Physical activity will help their children feel better about themselves and keep them away from negative influences (Aeffect, Inc., 2001).
And trying to keep the kids busy. I just had a couple of friends that had some problems with their kids with drugs and I’m like, “My God, keep them busy, keep them busy 24-7.”

- Physical activity can teach children important values and life lessons (Affect, Inc., 2001). For instance, physical activity can also be an important way to make friends and learn how to play well with others. Lexington parents in particular saw lessons in socialization as an important benefit of physical activity.

  And besides helping them with the exercise, it would also help my daughter who is painfully shy, and I think if she could get in a sort of (learn) team building and start spreading out a little bit and learning to make friends a little better, that would also be very healthy for her.

- When physical activity becomes a family event, parents value the opportunity it provides to communicate with their children, an opportunity that grows more precious as their children become increasingly independent. As noted previously, some tweens also value this time with their parent and spoke proudly in focus group discussion about times they’ve gone on walks/bike rides, etc. with their parents, and posited that less physically active kids are less likely to have parents who value physical activity.

Perceived costs

Although parents try to provide their children with opportunities, they are constrained by work and family commitments. These constraints, and limited financial resources, are especially daunting for parents of high risk, uninvolved tweens (Affect, Inc., 2000).

Parents are also concerned about their children’s safety. In Lexington, safety concerns were mentioned in the majority of parent focus groups. Many parents compared the freedom they experienced during their childhoods with the more difficult lives their children faced.

...riding your bike is something I always did as a kid, and it’s great exercise, but it’s a lot more difficult in our day and age. It’s not so safe anymore But then you have the other hand that, I’m sorry, we rode clear across town to the pool by ourselves when we were kids. I wouldn’t let my kid ride his bike by himself to the park.
Parents also complained about the costs of some activities and the fees charged by recreational facilities: As one Lexingtonian remarked: “Team sports cost a lot of money”. Lexington parents expressed a strong desire to see additional free and low-cost activities offered by local agencies such as the Lexington-Fayette County Division of Parks and Recreation, particularly after school and during the summer; and additional scholarships offered for area summer camps.

Parents’ hectic schedules and competing demands are among the most daunting barriers to promoting physical activity. Parents in Lexington talked at length about the problems they face juggling work and school schedules with their children’s needs for physical activity.

_She wanted to participate in some of the… the events at school, but I’ll be honest: With my work schedule, I’m not sure how we would work in the… all of the things that you need to get them to and the practices, because both my husband and I work._

_And I think this is where you get into the time management, and where I have a hard part, because my husband is after me all the time to do more exercise, and by the time you’ve worked all day, you come home and you do dinner and dishes and help them with their homework, when are you going to get physical activity?_

_See, and now, it’s just killing me because I’m not… I’m ripping and running. I get headaches trying… I’m ripping and running about six days a week out of seven. I have to take Sunday to rest. I go to church— I get up and go, try to go to early morning service so I can come back home and go to bed because I’m tired._

_Yeah, I’m stressed, which makes me grumpy, and then when I’m grumpy, the kids are grumpy, and the whole family suffers. And so, we limit the kids to one academic and one physical activity during the school year._

Importantly, hectic schedules are not a phenomenon limited to parents. Most focus groups saw mention of parent concerns about scheduling too many activities for tweens:

_Parent 1: And I really feel like a lot of the kids today are overscheduled._

_Parent 2: Yeah, and I think they’re stressed because of it._
Well, everyone is so involved—someone is in soc—A lot of children are involved in three and four and five things that, all of a sudden, when we grew up, there was a baseball team, there was a swim team. Now you have five or six different options, plus this camp to go to, that camp, camps are really busy.

Some parents also question their ability to control their children’s behavior as they grow more independent during the tween years.

In sixth grade, she tried out for track, made it and then quit. We couldn’t encourage her to just stick with it, which is what we try to do. Stick with it for this season, and then you don’t have to do it again if you don’t like it. But she wouldn’t stick with it.

I think, too, that they’re at the age, too, where if you said, “Why don’t you go out and take a walk?” and they just look at you like you’re nuts. Or, “We have a treadmill. Why don’t you go downstairs and walk 20 minutes on the treadmill?” Unless it’s their idea, they just kind of (just) look at you.

A few parents confessed that they had difficulty being a good role model. In addition to the time constraints that make it hard to model an active lifestyle, they had difficulty motivating themselves to do what they knew was right.

I have, my 12-year-old has been asking for the last couple of summers to do tennis, but neither of us, my husband and I, neither are into tennis, and it’s like finding the time for tennis lessons or a tennis program or whatever because it’s not something we’re into, so we just never have pursued it for him because we just don’t see the extra time available in our schedule.

So, that’s really hard. For me, the role modeling, personally, the role modeling is hard...because I’m quite content to be a slug. I have to really force myself to get up and...I don’t read a book, I devour a book. I can read a 3- or 400-page book in a day and a half, so, for me to put the book down and go get on a bike, it’s sometimes the hardest part of my day.

**Other Influencers**

Tweens also listen to their teachers, coaches, religious leaders and other adults (PortiCO Research, 2000). In the Lexington research, coaches were the most frequently mentioned sources of influence regarding physical activity (other than parents). It is important, as well, to remember peers in any list of tween influencers.
Tweens in Lexington reported being most likely to be swayed by messages from older peers regarding physical activity (as will be seen in the next section).

VERB™ program recommendations for educators and other community mentor and role models include:

- Create opportunities for kids to socialize around physical activity.
- Create opportunities for recognition: Make achievements tangible by giving awards or certificates of achievement.
- Integrate physical activity content into other subjects and activities.
- Stage a physical activity fair where local businesses, organizations, and physical activity leaders can demonstrate and excite kids about different types of physical activities and connect them to groups or locations for the ones they enjoy.
- Organize a map-making activity of free and low-cost physical activity areas nearby, such as parks and roller rinks, and then take the children out to these locations to play.
- Involve children in community service activities that give them an opportunity to move around, such as gardening or maintaining trails.
Marketing Questions

How can the coalition encourage parents to promote physical activity to tweens?

How can the coalition encourage teachers, and other community mentors to promote physical activity to tweens?
The Promotional Strategy includes guidelines for designing attention-getting and effective messages; spokespersons, and, designation of appropriate information. Promotional activities may encompass advertising, public relations, printed materials, promotional items, signage, special events and displays, personal selling and entertainment media as well as policy changes, professional training, community-based activities, and skills building usually are combined with communication activities to bring about the desired changes.

Communication Guidelines

A review of the tween literature (Aeffect, Inc., 2000) and other research conducted for the VERB™ program reaches the following conclusions about messages designed to reach tweens:

- Tweens like to have a voice in messages designed for them. They respond best to images and messages that depict kids like themselves, making it necessary to continuously monitor and update communications to ensure they reflect current preferences and trends. They also like to have the facts presented in a manner that lets them reach their own conclusions (Aeffect, Inc., 2000).
- When testing message concepts with tweens, parents, and other influencers, the VERB™ program designers found that tweens responded best to messages that helped them find something they are good at. Tweens from all ages and ethnicities liked the idea of making their own discoveries and finding the way to be their best; however, they balked at the notion of becoming a star or being active to be with other kids like themselves.
- Messages designed to reach involved teens should reinforce the idea that being involved makes them feel good about themselves and helps them realize their dreams.
- Messages designed to reach moderately uninvolved and passive tweens should encourage them to find a passion and reassure them that everyone is good at something.
• Messages designed to reach high risk kids are less receptive than involved kids about emotional messages that make a direct connection between being active and feeling good about one's self.
• Parents also respond well to messages that every child can be good at something. They did not react as favorably to messages that focused on life long health benefits, the challenges of being a parent, or taking pride in their children when they participate in activities.

Other recommendations for communicating with tweens include:

• Avoid using the term exercise
• Emphasize the point that physical activity does not have to be an organized sport, which many kids do not feel capable of joining (Michael Cohen Group, 2003).
• Make physical activity look fun
• Make active look easy. Emphasize that there is nothing complicated or intimidating about physical activity and reassure them they do not have to be athletes.
• Focus on children’s aspirations; encourage their dreams (Michael Cohen Group, 2003).
• Mom must be appeased
  – If you can, make it easier for her
  – Tell them “moms approve, too”
• Show tweens in groups with friends having fun
• Avoid making activity look too childish
• Promise popularity
• Create atmosphere of empowerment
• Reflect tweens’ everyday life and language
• Recognize diversity
• Ground efforts in ongoing research to keep up with the trends
• Shoot from their perspective – feet up
• Use viral marketing: visit chat rooms and spread the word to opinion makers, pay youth to promote product, and don’t script them so it is authentic

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

• Preaching or being authoritative (For instance, Lexington tweens eschewed the use of authority figures when we asked them to talk about effective ways to encourage physical activity).
• Talking down
• Trying to be too cool
Which of these guidelines do we want to adopt when designing messages and communication materials to reach tweens?
Spokespersons

- Use slightly older spokespersons: 2-3 years older (Aeffect, Inc., 2000).
- They also admire people who faced challenges like they do and made it

Lexington tweens indicated that older middle school and high school spokespersons would be ideal, particularly if these individuals were known either as good athletes or student representatives (i.e. class president).

Some Lexington tweens suggested that they’d be influenced by professional or college athletes and coaches as spokespersons. Even better received by fellow group members were suggestions that such individuals be made available to play alongside the tweens.

Marketing Questions

Which spokespersons do we want to use in promoting physical activity?
**For reaching tweens.** Today’s tweens are heavy media users: 50% tweens are connected to Internet; 81% have a radio in their room; 65% have a TV in their room; and 23% have a computer in their room.

- Television is still the best way to reach tweens, mentioned by Lexington tweens and their parents.
- Radio is excellent to reach them while they are doing other things, and was often suggested in the focus groups. A list of popular stations was generated from the focus groups. They include: 104, 107.3, 102.5, 98.1, 103.3, and 100.5.
- Magazines are excellent ways to reach specific segments of tweens.
- Popular internet sites also may be beneficial, though difficult for a local program to access.
- Lexington tweens recommended television and radio as important information sources.
- School-based sources of information (daily announcements, posters, handouts) were seen by the tweens as effective, as well.

**For reaching parents.** Importantly, parents tell us that they want to have a certain level of familiarity with a program before they are comfortable with their tween’s participation. Some Lexington parents remark that there is no central place for them to get information about opportunities for tween activity. School handouts, radio ads, newspaper ads, verbal communication from their children, and roadside signs are among the information sources for parents, some of who recommend a concerted effort at consolidating this information.

**Marketing Questions**

What activities do we want to sponsor to promote physical activity?


VERB Summer Scorecard

In an attempt to increase availability of and access to physical activity in Lexington, the Kentucky Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition sponsored the **VERB Summer Scorecard** program in the summer of 2004. Focus groups were used both before and during the program to assist in program design, implementation, and evaluation. While a wealth of data about scorecard benefits, barriers, and suggestions for improvement has been collected, this report represents a relatively brief summary of the findings as they relate to overall program success in encouraging physical activity among tweens. Should the coalition choose to continue the VERB Summer Scorecard program, a more detailed presentation of the available data can be utilized.

Tweens typically responded positively to the **VERB Summer Scorecard** program, indicating that they were likely to participate, particularly if their friends did. An ability to hang out with friends over the summer was seen as a benefit of the program, though older tweens indicated that they would prefer to avoid younger tweens at the events. The focus groups also revealed that the opportunity to win prizes was a major motivator for program participation among tweens. The tweens spent a lot of time in the focus groups looking at the prize list, and generally found several items they liked on the list. Some tweens commented that they hoped that they could choose their prizes, as they wouldn't want to win some of them. Tweens were also excited about several of the available activities. The focus groups revealed that tweens value variety in their physical activity choices, making the **VERB Summer Scorecard** program beneficial in that regard.

> I tried things I never tried before. I went bowling and climbed rocks. I went outside and played more than I usually do. (Lexington tween at conclusion of program)

Barriers to tween participation in the **VERB Summer Scorecard** program were aligned with cost factors mentioned elsewhere in this report. Time and transportation concerns were the barriers most often
mentioned, followed by financial cost. We found that some tweens have quite busy summer schedules (summer camps, vacations, and, for older tweens, jobs), while others reported relatively little daily activity.

Parents were generally pleased with the VERB Summer Scorecard program, as well. Again, the list of activities was well-received, and some parents were also pleased by the variety of activities offered, as they saw an opportunity for their tweens to try new activities. Some parents noted that the idea of timing one hour of play was motivating their children:

"My daughters went...well, they have both been swimming, because on Tuesday and Thursday nights from 6:00 to 8:00, swimming is free. So they've done that. They went to Champs. I just think they're more aware because you have to do it an hour. My daughter went outside and made sure she hula hooped for an hour. (Lexington parent)"

The availability of free and discounted physical activity outlets was both praised and critiqued in the parent focus groups. Many parents were pleased with the prospect of discounts for their children, some noting that the discounts served as their motivation for seeking out the card in the first place. Parents and tweens both liked that the card could be validated at home, and that all physical activities, including those they were already participating in, were eligible for a stamp. A few parents, though, expressed concern that the program came with a “catch”, noting that discounted admissions only led their children to want to return again and again, requiring the payment of full-price admissions. Another concern, unrelated to cost, was that some tweens may be too busy for the added activities.

"Let me ask you, and I haven't gotten my mind around this, either, and I see “free” written a lot. But my kids are the type to go do something for free once or twice, they want to keep going back and back and it costs money. And we don't have the money to put into that, or the time. And we're trying to simplify. We came from L.A., where it was just information overload, and just, everything is just thrown at you. No matter how hard you try to keep it out, it's just thrown at you. And so, we would not probably do anything like this. We wouldn't... This would be something... This would just be going back to square one with us. (Lexington parent)"
Another area of concern was VERB Summer Scorecard promotion and distribution. Most of the individuals who participated in the focus groups held during the program reported not having heard of the program. Tweens and parents both indicated that the cards should be distributed through the schools, perhaps accompanied by some sort of assembly where the program could be explained. Distribution venues such as those used in the program’s first year should be continued, according to the focus groups, while cards should also be made available in retail establishments and grocery stores. Promotion throughout the summer is important for program momentum, as noted by tweens and their parents. Oft-mentioned suggestions for maintaining this momentum include radio and television advertising and a greater frequency of city-wide events such as the Longest Day of Play and the Grand Finale.

Among several suggestions for any future versions of the VERB Summer Scorecard program, the most popular included concerns about event timing and card layout. Some focus group participants noted that they were disappointed because they were unable to fully participate in the Longest Day of Play, as it occurred on a week day when parents were working. Also, there was some agreement that the card itself contained too much information. Parents in particular wanted a full page calendar of events to display. Tweens who viewed the card for the first time in the focus groups had several questions about rules for validation and the nature of particular activities.

Despite some of these first-year concerns, there was ample participation in VERB Summer Scorecard activities. A total of 355 completed cards were turned in at the program’s conclusion. The program appears to have been most effective among younger tweens, as 69% of the individuals who turned in cards were between 9 and 11 years of age. One-third of the individuals who turned in scorecards self-identified as African-American, while 3% identified themselves as Hispanic, 1% as Asian, and 7% as “other”. There is no way of knowing how many scorecards were partially completed, though 7000 were printed and sent to various locations for distribution. In focus groups, tweens and parents often asked for extra cards for friends and siblings. In addition, an effort at tracing which activities were most popular through counting stamps proved impossible, due to difficulties inherent with effectively training all employees at Scorecard sites in validation procedures. Indeed there were reports in focus groups and field notes of some employees as Scorecard sites not being aware of the program. These reports lessened considerably as the summer went on.
Marketing Questions

Should the coalition implement the VERB Summer Scorecard Program in 2005?
If so:

Which organizations and people could offer action outlets?

Where should the scorecards be distributed? What changes should be made to the distribution process? How can we ensure the scorecards are being distributed correctly?

Which Scorecard action outlet partners should be asked to participate again?

How should the program be advertised or promoted?

What other modifications should be made to increase participation?