

NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY

TWITTER TOWN HALL



FINAL REPORT



August 2010



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INTRODUCTION

The National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) has led National HIV Testing Day (NHTD) since it began in 1995. CDC works with NAPWA to ensure this day contributes to the normalization and routinization of HIV testing and supports an overall HIV prevention strategy. To help continue the success of NHTD, and to build momentum both off- and online, CDC's National Prevention Information Network (NPIN) suggested that we could do an even better job to increase participation and to reach partners where they are by adding a social media component in 2010 activities.

An analysis of NPIN's Twitter followership and a review of AIDS service organizations and health departments on Twitter indicated that this social network was a venue where HIV/AIDS information was regularly being exchanged. The seed of an idea to have a Twitter chat on an HIV/AIDS topic grew after the Red Pump Project's successful Twitter Town Hall in March 2010. Through much discussion among NPIN, CDC, NAPWA, and AIDS.gov partners and hours of planning, the seed blossomed into a Town Hall on NHTD events held on June 3, 2010, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. EDT. The event brought CDC leaders and staff, federal and national partners, state and local health departments, community-based organizations (CBOs), individuals, and media together in a fast-paced and lively conversation whose impact is still being realized.

CONTENTS

This report describes the planning, logistics, and evaluation of the Twitter Town Hall, including:

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GOALS

Project goals were to promote partner awareness of and participation in NHTD activities, develop new relationships with participating partners, and build CDC's and NPIN's reach on this fast-growing social networking platform. Objectives included:

1. Increase partner conversations about NHTD on Twitter.
2. Offer partners new information and strategies for developing their NHTD activities.
3. Increase CDC's and NPIN's conversations with partners on Twitter and build followers.
4. Build capacity by sharing knowledge and know-how using this popular channel.

LOGISTICS

The NHTD Twitter Town Hall was CDC's first event of this type as an agency, requiring careful planning. This section reviews the essential logistical components to the Town Hall.

TWITTER TOWN HALL PARTICIPANTS: NHTD PARTNERS

The NHTD Twitter Town Hall was accomplished due to strong partnerships with varying levels of involvement:

- The event was planned and hosted by CDC through NPIN. AIDS.gov and the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) were major partners who participated in weekly planning meetings, publicized the event, and coordinated segments of the Town Hall meeting.
- The breadth and depth of the Town Hall conversation can be partially attributed to the decision to invite and involve a group of partners in advance of the Town Hall. Planners identified about 30 health departments, CBOs, and activists/influencers who regularly use Twitter and approached them several weeks before the Town Hall via Twitter and the telephone to outline the concept. An e-mail followed with an overview of event logistics and a request for the partners to publicize the event and to participate by sharing their experiences and asking questions. Many of these invited partners were very active participants in the Town Hall.
- The opening tweets from CDC Director Dr. Thomas Frieden and the real-time participation of National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHHSTP) Chief Medical Officer Dr. John Douglas and Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention (DHAP) Director Dr. Jonathan Mermin offered credibility, highlighted key messages, and let participants know that their work was valued by CDC leaders.

PLANNING AND PROMOTION

Intensive Town Hall planning took place over a 2-month period. Key tasks and tips for a successful event include:

- Creating a project plan and a timeline that details all tasks and deadlines and reviewing and updating it regularly.
- Developing a publicity plan with the support of partners.
 - *Example:* Our plan included promotion on Twitter and other social networks, blog posts, e-newsletters, and blast e-mails to partner lists. News of the event was disseminated by partners through their Twitter feeds, e-newsletters, and Web sites.
- Identifying core team members and collaborating partners, including a project coordinator to manage the tasks and timeline.
- Scheduling regular check-in meetings to review the timeline and address issues as they develop.
 - *Example:* Our team met weekly internally and engaged in a separate weekly meeting with major partners.
- Using all available communication channels to spread the word.
 - *Example:* Our team used the Twitter favorite widget on the CDC NPIN and HIVtest.org Web sites for advance publicity and to stream key tweets during the event to attract Web site visitors to Twitter.
- Developing a registered and publicized Town Hall hashtag (#NHTD) for people to use in their Town Hall tweets.
- Developing a risk management plan to deal with potential problems, including technical difficulties, sensitive questions or comments, and how to respond if the focus of the Town Hall shifted mid-event.
- Preparing tweets in advance of the Town Hall.
 - *Example:* Our team knew that the event could be fast-paced and with multiple voices, so tweets were developed in advance to cover key messages, resources, and logistical issues. Tweets were also developed to cover any sensitive questions or concerns that might arise.
- Organizing the Town Hall into key segments to keep focused on purpose and messages.
 - *Example:* Each major partner took responsibility for preparing tweets for their segment to relay information and stimulate conversation.
- Combining prepared tweets into a “Run of Show” document.
 - *Example:* The “Run of Show” was an invaluable document that served as a “script,” reminding the team in the heat of the Town Hall when to tweet certain messages, when to move to the next segment, and who was responsible for each prepared tweet. The “Run of Show” procedures included Welcome Tweets, Procedural Tweets, Opening Tweets from Subject Matter Expert Guest Tweeters, and Question Tweets (for the Q&A session).

- Offering advance tutorials and staff assistance during the event to participants unfamiliar with Twitter.
- Holding a run-through.
 - *Example:* Since this was a new experience for everyone involved, personal Twitter accounts and a nonrelated hashtag were used to hold several run-throughs in advance of the Town Hall. This helped planners see how the event would actually work and led to identifying and troubleshooting several potential problems.
- Remembering to accept the things that cannot be changed, such as Twitter’s propensity to go over-capacity.
 - *Example:* Our team checked the current news to avoid major events that would possibly cause a Twitter outage. Occasionally, major news or events spark a large amount of Twitter activity and result in a temporary outage of the Twitter servers (called a “fail whale” among Twitter users).

EVENT LOGISTICS

Communication was critical during the event itself, as tweets with diverse messages and questions came fast from many different partners. There were core team members in three different cities, two “event central” locations with multiple laptops and projectors, and a conference line that connected the team throughout the 90-minute event.

Key Logistical Considerations:

- **Keeping the Team Connected:** Being together physically or by phone helped with triage and response to questions. It provided a larger braintrust to draw from in response development and increased the camaraderie of the event.
- **Using the “Run of Show” To Execute Effectively:** The “Run of Show” was a critical script that was referenced throughout the event to stay on message and on time.
- **Defining Team Member Roles:** Team members had clear roles during the event to cover moderating, sending prepared tweets, favoriting specific tweets that would show on the Web sites via the Twitter widget, capturing screenshots and other metrics, and answering questions.
- **Preparing in Advance, but Following the Flow of the Town Hall.** At some point, the team relaxed and let the event unfold in all its unpredictability, following where it led while keeping focused on key messages, topics, and the flow of conversations.

FOLLOW-UP WITH PARTICIPANTS

The Town Hall was not over when it was over. To build on the energy and enthusiasm, the team worked to evaluate participation, solicit feedback, and identify lessons learned as the basis for future Twitter events. Follow-up activities included:

- Thanking participants via Twitter.
- Sending certificates to major partners and top tweeters.
- Setting up a brief survey and promoting the link on Twitter.
- Holding lessons learned meeting with major partners.

RESULTS

The Twitter Town Hall gathered together 145 participants in a 1½-hour forum to discuss National HIV Testing Day. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the level of reach, the outcomes, and the types of conversations that took place during this event. Tweets were captured through Twapper Keeper (twapperkeeper.com), an online program that archives tweets for export and analysis.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS: LOOKING AT THE REACH AND EVENT OUTCOMES

During the Twitter Town Hall, approximately 1,005 tweets were tracked on the #NHTD hashtag from 145 separate Twitter accounts.

Reach by Followers

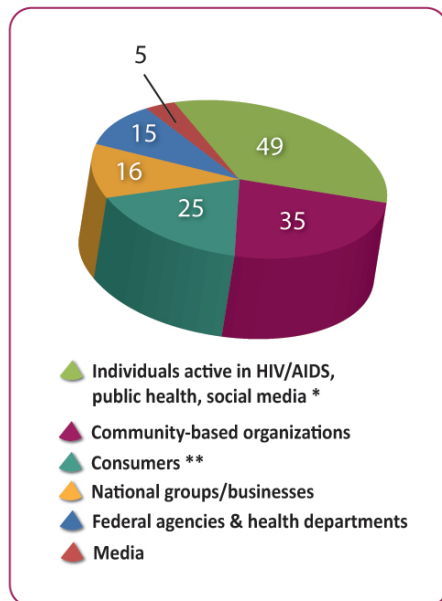
Examining the reach of the *10 participant accounts with the most followers alone*, 192,183 followers were calculated who could have received some Town Hall tweets:

1. @womenshealth: 55,201 followers.
2. @CDC_eHealth: 45,290 followers.
3. @healthfinder: 39,685 followers.
4. @AIDSgov: 26,499 followers.
5. @SIENewark: 5,864 followers.
6. @cressycat: 5,132 followers.
7. @amednews: 4,814 followers.
8. @SocialBttrfly: 3,798 followers.
9. @northernchick: 3,585 followers.
10. @AIDSCouncilNENY: 2,315 followers.

Total Reach of Top Ten Participants: 192,183 followers.

Total reach, including followers from all participating Twitter accounts, was approximately 243,000 individuals.

Figure 1 - Reach by partner type of the 145 Twitter Town Hall participant accounts.



Reach by Partner Type

To gauge whether the intended partner audience was reached, the 145 participant Twitter profiles were reviewed and categorized (**Figure 1**).

* Some of these appeared to be staff of CBOs or health departments using their personal Twitter accounts.

** “Consumers” is the category for participants who did not identify themselves as belonging to one of the partner categories.

Event Outcomes

1. To assess whether the NHTD Town Hall may have contributed to a group holding an NHTD event, the team looked at event submissions through www.hivtest.org and noted that at least seven organizations who participated in or were personally invited to join the Town Hall submitted NHTD events through the Web site. An interesting note: NHTD event submissions increased by 14% from 2009.
2. CDC NPIN’s Twitter followership increased more than 10% in the week surrounding the Twitter Town Hall.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: LISTENING AND PARTICIPATING IN THE NHTD CONVERSATIONS

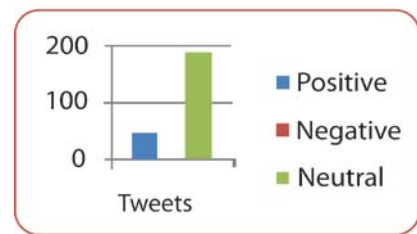
“Listening,” i.e., the process of understanding the flow of Twitter conversations, yielded several interesting themes as participants chatted with each other on a range of topics. The methodology for analyzing these tweets was based upon grounded theory and conversational analysis (Ten Have, 1999).

Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis is a form of opinion mining and involves the process of reading through each tweet and understanding the tweeter’s attitude. A random sample of 233 tweets was collected, and individual tweets were characterized as positive, negative, or neutral. The majority of

tweets were neutral (79%) and involved asking questions or providing answers, sharing information about promotional plans, or retweeting facts and figures (**Figure 2**). The remaining tweets (21%) were positive, shown by welcoming others to the discussion, praising the Town Hall itself, or commending others for their comments. No negative or inappropriate comments were found in the record of tweets during the *entire* Town Hall.

Figure 2 - Sentiment analysis of 233 tweets showed most Twitter Town Hall tweets were neutral.



Theme Analysis: Looking at the Various Types of Conversations

The results of the Twitter Town Hall revealed several types of conversations and discussion topics. Participants were generally enthusiastic about engaging in the event, many comparing it to a radio talk show. As shown below, the flow of conversations started from announcements about the Town Hall, followed by invitations for participants to engage in discussion. Within 10–15 minutes of the start of the Town Hall, participants began settling into conversations that revealed many key themes that will be discussed later in this document.

PRIOR TO THE TOWN HALL: PROMOTIONS AND GEARING UP

Participants tweeted announcements about the Twitter Town Hall before the start of the event, reminding their followers of the date and time and encouraging them to “join the conversation.” Conversations were limited, but retweets and “shout-outs” (i.e., mentions of the event) were very common during this period as participants raised a sense of excitement and anticipation about both the Town Hall and NHTD. Here are some examples:

- RT@AIDSgov: Are you ready to tweet Thurs 6/3 3:00-4:30 pm ET in Twitter Town Hall on #NHTD event planning? Share your plans get ideas.
- Today - Join the conversation - @AIDSgov @CDCNPIN host Twitter Town Hall on National HIV Testing Day @3 pm EST. Use #NHTD to tune in.

INVITATIONS: SOLICITING PEOPLE TO ENGAGE

At the onset of the event, some participants began setting the stage for conversations even before the introductions were finished. By asking broad questions on the NHTD hashtag, participants solicited others to engage in discussion:

- What are your big ideas for NHTD?
- What are your most pressing concerns for this NHTD?

NOTE: Questions were very important to the flow of the Town Hall. Future Town Hall planners should consider a moderator responsible for retweeting questions to the forum. Some may have trouble following the rapid timeline, so retweets may assist them in catching and answering questions.

KEY THEMES

Conversations were generally brief, consisting of three to five tweets among participants, but they were significant. Important discussion topics included HIV testing, vaccine trial participation, HIV education, addressing stigma, and strategies for expanding HIV testing. The following are examples of several key conversations that were revealed during the analysis:

Relationship-Building: Connecting Partners

- **1loveproject** Yes! Let's collaborate. RT @MetroTeenAIDS: exactly our philosophy at MTA, @1loveproject! check us out at metroteenaids.org & realtalkdc.org.
BTPMay19 @napwaus Do you have an API poster? Let us know if you want to get together to produce one! [#NHTD](#).

Plans and Promotions for National HIV Testing Day

- **stacysmallwood** last year we did a "text-a-friend-to-test" day at church. set up laptops, food, invited ppl to text/facebook/tweet their friends [#NHTD](#).
 - **BTPMay19** @AIDSgov We'll promote our HIV testing services for [#NHTD](#) on FB and Twitter, and we want to integrate the text-2-test idea as well!
- **MetroTeenAIDS** our [#NHTD](#) event is our 5th annual Hoop'n 4 HIV All-Star Go Go Basketball Tournament. lots of prizes & incentives. we're excited!

Facts, Figures, and Important Issues

- **HarmReduction** @CDCNPIN For injection drug users, offering hepatitis C testing draws people in for HIV testing as well - lots of concern about hep C [#NHTD](#).
- **SIENewark** How can we reach bi-sexual African American men who don't identify as such? Or men who have M-T-F transwomen as partners? [#NHTD](#).
- **RedPumpProj** Seniors are one population that's seeing an increase in HIV infection rates. AIDS doesn't know age so they do need some attention [#NHTD](#).
- **RocVictAlliance** [#NHTD](#) In 2007, heterosexual contact accounted for 83% of diagnoses among women. Help end AIDS. Click: <http://rochestervictoryalliance.org>.

Thank Yous/Recaps

- **healthfinder** Great discussion today on [#NHTD](#). Thanks for letting us be a part of it-- great insights gained from all participants. [#NHTD](#).
- **Aniz_Inc** Wow is it 4:30 already. @CDCNPIN -TY for a wonderful & engaging Twitter townhall. Great info and ideas. And mny new colleagues!!!! #nhtd.
- **keligoff** Hate that I missed today's CDC twitter townhall @CDCNPIN on National HIV Testing Day which is later this month [#NHTD](#)

LESSONS LEARNED

The careful planning and collaborative partnerships paid off with strong participation from the target audiences, and multiple, diverse conversations related to the National HIV Testing Day event focus. There were several challenges faced and actions that could be taken in future Town Halls to increase participation, improve response time, and extend the conversation:

Planning and Promotion

- **Contacting and Collaborating with Partners Early:** The partners contacted in advance of the event were an integral part of the Town Hall's success. More partners could be included in future planning efforts.
- **Creating a Central Landing Page for the Event:** It is important to have an online home for the Town Hall, such as a Web site splash page or a blog post, to link people to more information in advance of the event. The link should be included in all promotional materials. In particular, people wanted to know how the Town Hall would work logistically and the best way to follow it.
- **Designing Sample Tweets for Partners:** In the pre-event overview sent to partners, it may have helped promotional efforts to have some sample publicity tweets ready for partners to post to Twitter.

Control Center

- **Assigning Tweet Monitors to Record Tweet Activity:** Questions and comments came very quickly and from multiple accounts. It would be useful to have several "Tweet Monitors" to record all questions, including the Twitter account the question came from and the time it came in so it is easy to find for a reply. Use of a whiteboard to record questions and replies would also be helpful.

Following Up with the Town Hall Activity

- **Continuing to Monitor Activity Following Event:** People kept using the hashtag #NHTD immediately after the event and continued tweeting as National HIV Testing Day (June 27) approached. It is important to continue to monitor the hashtag and Twitter direct mentions to respond to ongoing questions and comments and extend the conversations. Always remember that the Town Hall isn't over when it's over.

CONCLUSION

A Twitter Town Hall offers a free, simple, fun, and innovative avenue to bring people together for community building, information sharing, strategy development, and collaboration. Virtual gatherings like this event are invaluable in a time of limited staff and financial resources that often precludes conference participation.

In the Twitter activity following the Town Hall, connections formed during the event continued into productive relationships. Several Town Hall participants report the intent to collaborate on concrete resources, such as an Asian Pacific Islander NHTD poster, and on longer term projects, such as message development with youth who are HIV-positive.

The Twitter Town Hall is a tool that can be used by organizations of any size. Although CDC put considerable human resources into this Town Hall as the agency's inaugural event, Twitter Town Halls can be conducted with fewer resources and less planning time, as long as organizations plan well the key ingredients of purpose, partners, and promotion.

In closing, our gratitude goes to the 145 participants who shared their experiences, knowledge, innovative ideas, and passion during the Town Hall. They are on the front lines of the HIV prevention struggle, and we are honored to be one of their followers.

CDC would also like to thank the many people involved for their hard work in planning and implementing the Town Hall, including the following:

- **National Prevention Information Network**
- **Partner Organizations:**
 - **AIDS.gov**
 - **National Association of People Living with AIDS (NAPWA)**

For more information on the Twitter Town Hall, please contact info@cdcnpin.org

REFERENCE

Ten Have, P. (1999). *Doing Conversational Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.