



Immunize Weekly Summary: September 17, 2026 Engaging Young Adults

- Families Fighting Flu (FFF) Young Adult Programs
- UNITY Consortium: Engaging Young Adults: Vaccination Programs and Resources
- Voices for Vaccines: Reaching Young Adults
- Vaccinate Your Family (VYF) Respiratory Season Communications Campaign
- Announcements

FFF Young Adult Programs – Irelynd McCarthy, Marketing Intern, and Eric Stein, Marketing, Communications, and Program Specialist, FFF

Irelynd McCarthy and Eric Stein outlined some secrets to success in engaging young people.

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Lessons Learned

Through efforts such as its junior board made up of middle school through college-age students, FFF clubs for high school students, and ambassador programs for college students, FFF has learned key lessons for engaging young people:

- **Less is more:** Boards with too many members are counterproductive, and it is difficult to convene large groups of people with varied schedules and interests.
- **Play to your volunteers' individual strengths:** Some students enjoy creating video content, while others prefer writing or graphic design, while still others bring unique skills. Allowing young people to contribute according to their individual interests boosts involvement and is easier on the coordinators.
- **Be explicit about what you want:** Give young volunteers explicit prompts and details about what you want from them.
- **Set the destination:** Clarify your goals and let young volunteers figure out how to reach them.

Dynamic and Appealing Approaches

FFF's TikTok post on staying healthy to avoid missing class garnered 75,000 likes, demonstrating that young people are interested in messaging about overall health. A new issue of its Flu Fighters comic book, [Kaden Blaze](#), based on a real survivor's battle against influenza, will be published September 23; it features some new characters, also based on real young people. FFF's social media sites are integrating more dynamic and interactive components, such as slideshows (a.k.a. carousels on TikTok), videos, and polls. FFF is

launching a new unstructured, unfiltered webinar series led by and for young adults that will act as an open forum for discussion. During National Influenza Vaccine Week, FFF's social media will showcase 10 days of Flu Fighters, featuring individual's stories and motivations for vaccination. See more FFF resources [here](#).

UNITY Consortium: Engaging Young Adults: Vaccination Programs and Resources – Judy Klein, President, UNITY Consortium

Judy Klein highlighted some of UNITY's initiatives to reach young adults.

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UNITY's Smart Energy campaign includes graphics, blogs, and other resources emphasizing that getting vaccinated is the smart thing to do, all tested by UNITY's Teen Advisory Council. The campaign highlights learning about what vaccines young people need and where to get reliable health information. Summit partners are welcome to use the resources, available on UNITY's [back-to-school web page](#).

[Trusted Teen CommUNITY](#) educates and empowers young people to become informed and trusted voices. The program sponsors small, community-led, pilot projects in which individuals engage young people in locally defined efforts to increase awareness about vaccines. In one project in Philadelphia, a young participant expressed skepticism about vaccines at the outset, saying she had never heard any positive messages about vaccination until she joined the project. As a result of the curriculum, she became an advocate for vaccination in her community, which had suffered a hepatitis A outbreak.

UNITY also hosts the [FACTSinnated](#) podcast, featuring conversations with guest experts about adolescent and young adult vaccination; a Substack newsletter of the same name is in the works. UNITY also has a presence on various social media platforms; its social media toolkits are available [online](#). Summit partners are invited to submit items for UNITY's monthly newsletter by emailing unity@unity4teenvax.org.

Voices for Vaccines: Reaching Young Adults – Karen Ernst, Program Director, Voices for Vaccines

Karen Ernst explained that to reach young adults, you must understand where they are, how they access health information, who they trust, and how to translate their experience into action.

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Teens and young adults use YouTube routinely for everything from health education to entertainment, and they report regularly receiving health information from TikTok

influencers. Although some research shows they view social media messages with some skepticism and do not necessarily trust influencers over their own primary care providers, they do have consistent and ongoing relationships with those influencers, more so than with their providers.

Ms. Ernst encouraged Summit partners to lean in to video content via social platforms and offered tips:

- Keep videos short and direct, covering a single piece of information.
- Be authentic: the setting, delivery, and style can be informal rather than professionally produced and scripted.
- Have the speaker engage in some normal, everyday activity while talking (e.g., cooking).

A short video might feature an expert making an observation about current events, a brief explainer to counter specific misinformation, or an anecdote about a personal experience that led to some action. Viewers should be able to learn something from the video, not just hear a story, and the message should have a clear tie to accurate science. Longer-form videos might tackle bigger topics, and excerpts from a longer video can also be posted. (Find examples and other resources at the Voices for Vaccines [website](#).)

After posting content, Ms. Ernst advised checking the comments section for questions that offer an opportunity to educate and clear up misunderstandings. Summit partners are welcome to contact Ms. Ernst directly (email info@izsummitpartners.org for contact information).

VYF Respiratory Season Communications Campaign – Diana Yassanye, MSeD, Director of Communication, Vaccinate Your Family

Diana Yassanye, MSeD, outlined the plans for VYF's 2026–27 respiratory vaccination campaign, Protect, Prepare, Prevent.

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As part of the National Respiratory Communications Initiative, VYF, The Summit (Immunize.org), and others are developing their own communications campaigns with a set of shared principles: expressing a unified core message; ensuring consistent framing, voice, and tone; addressing false information; and aligning terminology and style. In addition to influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and COVID-19, messaging from VYF and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases will address pneumococcal disease, for which vaccination recommendations are more complex.

In the absence of recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, VYF and other are relying on the

recommendations of major medical societies. The American Medical Association website [SpreadTheFacts.org](https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/covid19) offers a downloadable 1-page summary consolidating the respiratory virus vaccine recommendations of multiple professional organizations.

VYF launches its campaign on September 21; graphics and other materials (in English and Spanish) will be available [online](#). It will engage community members, advocates, and influencers to get the message out and is always seeking new voices who can speak to different audiences. For example, in November and December, VYF ads on the FlightAware flight tracker app will highlight the importance of being vaccinated in advance so you can enjoy the holidays. VYF will also tailor its campaign messaging during National Influenza Vaccination Week (December 6–12). It plans to end the campaign in March but maintains the flexibility to continue messaging as needed, as was the case with the extended RSV season in spring 2026.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q: The example from UNITY of the person who had never heard anything positive about vaccines — how did you even get that person to engage and start to learn? How do you get people, without their having experienced a terrible family tragedy, to start being engaged?

Judy Klein (UNITY): Great question. Through the Trusted Teen CommUNITY, I think the whole concept behind it is to do it at the community level—the outreach works through their local mentor. In this particular instance, their local mentor happened to be their nursing teacher at their high school, and she had 12 students who said, “Yeah, I want to participate.” So they kind of knew what they were getting into, but it wasn’t like they were connecting directly with UNITY and making some big commitment.

I think that’s how it happened. We did a focus group with all of the students and the teacher, and it wasn’t unusual. She was kind of a case we wanted to amplify. There was a lot of misinformation, and they were able to get better information and appreciated that clarity. So much influence now is within these communities, versus coming down from organizations to the community level. I think that’s why it’s working.

We have two other pilot candidates starting: one is a college student who wants to be a mentor and go into their local high school up in Boston, and another is working with their mom. So I think having them talk with their own networks is a better way to reach a more diverse group of people with different perspectives.

Diana Yassanye (VYF): At Vaccinate Your Family we have an entire advocate program called SQUAD for people interested in sharing their stories, but we also reach people on social media—talk to them, offer them a safe vehicle, an education space, without any presumption. Judy, like your team, it takes scanning and it takes connection.

Q: We often find people with genuine questions in the comments on our social posts, and sometimes you have to sort through them. Karen mentioned a new platform that Voices for Vaccines is using to review comments outside the platforms themselves. What are you using?

Karen Ernst (Voices for Vaccines): We just signed up for something called RecurPost. It takes care of a lot of issues for us at once, but the big one is that our comments can get very buried, and when you're using more than one platform it becomes a lot of work just to find the comments. But we know comments are important—they affect how people feel about the article, post, or video. So it was important for us to find a way to make those comments more easily accessible.

Q: How do you make staying healthy cool? I do see, through my kids in their 20s, more attention to health, at least weightlifting—but how do you add the other things and make staying healthy cool in a way that also includes not getting sick?

Eric Stein (FFF): Yeah, I think it's about finding what your peers are really focused on—whether that's weightlifting and staying in shape, or for some people it's not wanting to miss the college football game or the party this weekend, or having so much work that they can't afford to miss a test. So framing it around how they're actually thinking is helpful.

I've also noticed that as people see the health space getting more contentious, with a lot more information from both sides and nobody really knowing what to trust, it helps to just be vocal and confident and not overcomplicate things—saying, “Here's what I heard, not sure if this is right, but we can research it together.” If you answer questions you don't actually know the answer to, it comes off as disingenuous, and people can tell.

Q: How can we work with health departments that are slow to adopt platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and whatever comes next, because they're sitting and waiting?

Karen Ernst (Voices for Vaccines): Some sitting and waiting is reasonable, honestly, because there have been platforms that turned out to be nothing—I don't even remember the names of them, they're gone. I'm not telling you to join Rumble, for example, though if you want to, you can.

I do think it's important, especially when dealing with government agencies, that we give young people a voice inside those agencies and reflect back to them how to connect. Families Fighting Flu and UNITY have both done a great job having young ambassadors on boards who can talk directly to them. That's where I'd start. We need a youth advisory board at our local public health department, where they can tell us, “I'm watching TikTok seven hours a day, maybe talk to me there.” So I think it's about taking a page out of UNITY's and Families Fighting Flu's playbook. Invite young people in, and families too, and have advisory boards where people can tell you what's actually going on in their lives, through a regular-person lens rather than a public health or health care lens.

Judy Klein (UNITY): I could just jump in real quick—great points from Karen. I’d add that in our Teen Advisory Council, when we ask where they feel comfortable going, very often they say their local health department. So social media is one thing, but making sure your website is up to date and easily accessible might be an easier lift.

Announcements

- Medscape Education released a curriculum, [*Targeting Viral Hepatitis: A Road Map for Providers*](#), with several activities featuring expert perspectives on preventing and managing viral hepatitis. Among the activities is [“Are Your Workflows Working? Embedding Hepatitis Screening and Vaccination into Routine Care,”](#) codeveloped and moderated by Immunize.org’s L. J. Tan, PhD.
- The NAIIS Operationalizing Adult Immunization Workgroup has been updating their resources. Please find all the updated resources [here](#).