

After the Summit: Building Community Networks for America's Youth

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ABSTRACT

After the Summit: Community Networks for America's Youth

The Project

The purpose of this research project is to provide a guide for local coordinators and organizers of America's Promise and other national initiatives. It looks at the new paradigm of community youth development how it is changing the ways that social organizations are conducting business. It explores how to create community networks as a way for communities to better serve their young people. In this project, a community network is defined as an association of individuals representing different organizations and associations working together (collaborating) to achieve a common long term vision or goal. Although there is a rich diversity among community networks, all networks have similar elements. This manual describes these elements and provides further resources to aid local network development.

The Findings

Communities throughout the United States are beginning to look for new ways to provide resources to young people. One of the new methods is to create community networks which integrate services, increase the capacity of community members to initiate new projects, and provide more access to services and information. These networks are being created throughout the nation at local, regional and national levels.

The major findings of this project is that creating community networks is a relatively new social endeavor. There is an overall need to educate communities, national organizations, and philanthropic institutions about the importance of the efforts. The local networks would benefit significantly with additional support including training of community organizers, funding resources, evaluation materials, and technological assistance.

Project Importance

This manual is a needed resource. There is a lot of information on the theory of collaboration; however, there are few resources on how to organize a network, what types of decisions have to be made, and how to implement network activities. This manual is created as a reference book rather than a large volume of research information, in order to provide a broad understanding of community networks.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

research questions

The purpose of this research project is to provide a guide for local coordinators and organizers of America's Promise and other national initiatives. It looks at the new paradigm of community youth development how it is changing the ways that social organizations are conducting business. This research investigates the community networks for youth, or associations of individuals representing different organizations and associations working together (collaborating) to achieve the common long term vision of healthy and successful young people. The project asks the questions How are they formed? What do they do? How are they organized? What challenges do they face? What types of support do they need to be successful?

All community initiatives have a life cycle. They begin, they define direction and mobilize support, they act, they continue or they disperse or evolve. The framework of this project is based on the elements that make up the life cycle of community networks. It also asks how can national organizations can support local community efforts.

network initiation:

- Why do communities create networks?
- How do they begin?

systems development:

- What is the structure and processes of community networks.
- What are the roles and responsibilities of members?

action:

- What do are the primary activities of community networks?

evaluation:

- How are networks evaluated?
- What are common indicators used in network evaluation?

sustainability:

- How do networks maintain support?
- What challenges do they face?

national support::

- How can national organizations support the efforts of local networks?

This project focuses specific attention to the role of the network organizer. A primary goal of this project was to discuss with network coordinators their unique role and responsibilities in community initiatives. There are many excellent resources available on the skills of collaboration, leadership, facilitation, project planning and organizing. However, there are few resources that focus on developing and institutionalizing collaborative systems. From the beginning intended to be reference resource rather than a large volume of research information. The intention was to give an overview and starting point for beginning organizers. The Corporation for National Services members that will most benefit from this study AmeriCorps Promise Fellows and Vista and AmeriCorps Leaders. Local organizers affiliated with Americas Promise, Communities in Schools, Communities that Care, Search Institute and Partners in Education will also find this information useful.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

methodology

This research is based on interviews and surveys network coordinators and national training providers. It combines information from these interview with information from professional literature on collaboration, organizational theory, public administration and management. This project gives overviews of topics, rationales and best practices synthesized from case studies, training manuals and professional literature. Survey materials were sent to 150 community networks, coalitions and councils. Seventy surveys were returned with fifty of the respondents agreeing to participate in follow up interviews. Of the seventy respondents, forty included supplemental information including brochures, annual reports and newsletters. The surveys were analyzed based on whether they represented widespread of community interests, were youth focused and were locally based. Twenty five survey respondents were interviewed with five groups being selected for in-depth analysis. These five were picked based on the willingness of the coordinator to participate in this research over a period of several months.

key findings

Most community networks are based on the belief that fragmentation of social services and community interests is not an effective way for communities to bring about social change. They recognize the issues they face are complex and no one agency or organization can solve them alone.

This research has indicated that the goals of community youth development are an effective mobilizing tool. Communities are facing the challenges of providing there youth with needed resources with creativity, dedication and optimism. The movement has engaged many new sectors of the community such as business, higher education and citizens. It has created new partnerships among faith based organizations, non profit and government. However, it still has a long way to go.

In many of the communities studied there was a recognition by organizers that their work faced many challenges. One of the primary was that collaboration on a large scale was a very new concept. Although partnering occurs among organizations, instituting a system of collaboration was much less common in these communities. The idea of integrating services, building community leadership and sharing resources among organizations was not familiar to many community members. In some areas, this people were resistant to the change, in others they did not see how such change could be institutionalized.

Organizational culture in many community organizations was sited as a major barrier. Many social service organizations struggling to develop resources for there programs felt threatened by new initiatives targeting their service populations. Some do not want to invest their resources of staff time, information and connections until they can see tangible benefits from their efforts. For coordinators, creating collaborative systems meant spending time discussing how the initiative was not in competition with these programs but a means to support existing efforts.

Another challenge for community networks is the focus most funding organizations on direct service and outcome evaluations. Community networks are generally a few steps removed from direct service to client populations. The coordinators had to create new evaluation systems that focus on indirect impacts and outcomes of capacity building, information exchange, mobilization and service integration. They have had to find ways to communicate these benefits to funding institutions and the community to gain continued support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

implications and recommendations

Often we hear that there are no cookie cutter responses to community initiatives. That each community needs to develop their own solutions. Community building is an art. Creating community networks based on collaboration, information sharing and streamlining of services will be a unique endeavor in each location and with each community that it occurs. However, there are common ingredients to community networks. One of the strongest implications from this research is that local communities need more support and guidance from national organizations. There needs to be a unified effort to changing the ways our communities address social issues.

Community initiatives would benefit by a clarification of the unique role of each national initiative and their commitment to support a common vision. Emphasize how the models are complementary and are different angles of the same common mission. Unless the national groups can “walk the talk” of collaboration; local groups will continue to struggle with sorting out all the different ways to sustain community youth development. Communities should strive to build as many linkages among all 5 resources and all 40 assets. National groups need to support local communities’ attempts to link the resources in innovative ways, though the development of community networks and comprehensive systems of support.

There is a strong need to develop a mutual understanding of the tracking and outcomes community networks. There is an overarching need in the community sector to recognize the valuable impacts of community building activities and develop evaluation methods for these unique systems. National organizations can play a vital role in developing systems of evaluation, providing evaluation training and educating funding institutions about community wide evaluations.

Most successful community initiatives have a full time coordinator supporting the efforts. An assessment of the role of these coordinators and what support they need is necessary. National organizations can support the development of local organizers by expanding the provision of leadership training to national service volunteers. They can also be an advocate to funding organizations of the importance of capacity building and full time local coordinators.

Many national organizations and programs focusing on community youth development employ program officers who are liaisons for local or regional groups. Unfortunately, these officers are based at the central headquarters and have widely dispersed territories, making it difficult to gain an understanding of specific communities, groups, opportunities and challenges so they can help facilitate problem solving, visioning and community building. Expanding the role and placement of field officers would play a key role to bringing more coordinated resources to local efforts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Manual Outline

The manual is divided into two sections. The first section is an overview of network development. The second section contains recommendations for national groups supporting local community youth initiatives. Links to websites containing further information are provided in each chapter.

part one: network development

Each chapter of this manual addresses a different stage of network development.

chapter one: Introduction

This chapter introduces the concepts of community youth development and community networks

chapter two: network initiation:

This chapter explores the conditions that community networks are born in. It discusses mobilization and creating visions and missions.

chapter three: network structure:

This chapter describes the ways that networks are organized. It discusses different roles and responsibilities of members and how make decisions and plan for action.

chapter four: network action:

This section breaks down some of the common activities a network organizer may be involved in or responsible for. Under each section there will be a description of what the activity is, what other people have done, universal tips of the trade, negotiating trouble areas, and resources.

chapter five: network evaluation:

This chapter introduces the process of evaluating network activities. It addresses the issues of how networks identify their outcomes, impacts, and conduct assessments of goals and activities.

chapter six: network sustainability:

This section discusses the factors that lead to network sustainability.

part two: recommendations for supporting local networks

This section addresses the role that national initiatives play in supporting local communities. It discusses the need for a more comprehensive approach to support network development.

Appendix: Survey and References

INTRODUCTION

introduction

For the past ten years “youth” topics have been growing in the national conscience. In media, political debates, town halls and kitchen table talks across the nation people are concerned about the state of our youth. We hear talk about the failing educational systems, the tragedy of Columbine, the implications of standardized testing, and the latest talk show episode on “wild” teens or abuse survivors. We hear how many children live below the poverty level, how many do not have adequate health care, some are too hungry to learn, and some do not have a caring adult in their lives. We hear this and we want to do something about it.

The question has been raised: What can we do to take better care of our kids? One approach, community youth development, calls for methods that strengthen young people’s assets so they can be more successful. The community youth development approach places responsibility of raising youth on the entire community. It’s the realization that it is not just parents or schools that need to respond . . .it takes a village.

What is a village? In our world we have few places that look like the connected villages the African proverb invokes. A place where every member has a role in the protection and prosperity of the entire village. Where resources are shared and relationships are extended and stable. This is not our world anymore.

So the question remains. How can we raise healthy kids and build healthy communities in a complex and fragmented world? How do we create new villages? This project is to explore how creating community networks are one way to organize ourselves so we can work together It is looking at real world village creation.

Community networks are collaborative initiatives among community members to address a common vision. The key element is that individuals representing different community interests create voluntary agreements to collaborate. Through collaboration they create a system or network of groups and individuals that supports and connects the individual efforts of the community. Networks are different than partnerships created to implement a specific projects such as hosting community summit. Communities networks are systems, or the place where these types of partnerships are actively created and supported.

Community networks look very different in different places. They represent different geographic scales from neighborhood, city, county, state, and national. They can be formal or informal systems. They can be narrowly issue oriented such as homelessness or the environment or they can take a broad spectrum such as community development or social justice.

Introduction

why do communities create networks?

Most community networks are based on the belief that fragmentation of social services and community interests is not an effective way for communities to bring about social change. They recognize the issues they face are complex and no one agency or organization can solve them alone. They work collaboratively because they believe it will be more effective in creating change.

Community building is an inclusive process—is not done to community members its is done with the members as the dreamers, planners and implementers of a collective vision. Inclusivity helps align existing resources and create new and dynamic ways to address issues. Collaboration is a process through which parties who come from different aspects of the issue can constructively search for alternatives that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.

While community building may involve starting some new local institutions, it primarily means working with, and strengthening, the families, schools, businesses, religious organizations, civic groups and government agencies that already exist in communities. Creating a community network brings strangers together in a democratic, civic organization; develops their awareness and talents; identifies issues of common concern and strategies for addressing them; builds strength in numbers for people and communities to advocate for changes in the community.

role of the network coordinator

The organizer plays a very important role in network development. The more expansive and ambitious the community collaboration the more there is a need for at least one person focusing their attention on the collaboration.

Coordinators facilitate collaboration by spreading the vision, initiating dialogues, administrating the activities, and advocating institutionalization in community organizations. As one coordinator comments:

“It’s the collaborators that collaborate-- we are just here to ignite the spark and supply some fuel its up to them to do the rest”.

Often coordinators are brought into the initiative after there has been some initial mobilizing. If this is the case the coordinator needs know where the group is in the process and where they would like to go.

definitions

community:

The local context in which people live. Often it is thought of as a geographic location, but its place on the map is only one of its attributes. It is a dynamic network of associations that binds individuals, families, institutions, and organizations into a web of interconnections and interaction.

community network:

Infrastructure that connects groups and individuals in order to address a common interest, vision and/or goal. Related terms: Coalition, community initiative, council.

capacity building:

Building the capacity of a community to solve problems and make improvements. Related terms: Assets building, resource development, community building.

network coordinator:

Person responsible for administration of a community network. Related Terms: Facilitator, organizer, initiator, activist.

Introduction

principles of community youth development

Community youth development is an approach to youth services and education based on two principles.

- 1). The strength of youth developmental assets --or those opportunities, experiences and environments that support positive development;
- 2). It is the responsibility and ability of all community members in supporting young people. Parents, corporations, faith-based institutions, non-profits, schools, youth, adults everyone is able to pledge some sort of commitment to this cause.

Community youth development recognizes that a comprehensive approach to ensuring the health and success of young people is needed. The need to support the entire youth, their physical, social , and educational development challenges the community to develop a comprehensive system. This system connects different community sectors and youth services (i.e.. education, health, mentoring, workforce development) so that the entire community can more effectively support youth and their families.

resources

National Network for Youth
www.nn4youth.org

Search Institute
www.search-institute.org

National Association of Partners in Education
www.partnersineducation.org

Coalition for Healthy Communities.
www.healthycommunities.org

National 4-H Council
www.fourhcouncil.edu/cyd

elements of community youth development

comprehensive—multifaceted, addressing many issues at once;

coordinated, integrated, and collaborative—services, programs and activities are not operating in isolation;

family and/or community focused—focusing on children as individuals and as part of a family and on families as part of neighborhoods and communities;

inclusive of citizen participation—encouraging active participation by community residents, clients of the service system, and other community stakeholders in planning, designing, and implementing initiatives;

strength-focused—building on the strengths of the families and communities;

responsive to individual differences—responsive to the needs of individuals with disabilities and of culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse populations;

universally available—making services available to anyone in the community who wants or needs access to them;

accountable—focusing on improving the outcomes for children and families, not simply providing services;

flexible—having the ability to use funds to address the locally determined needs.

Introduction

america promise initiative

In 1997, the Presidents Summit on America’s Future was held in Philadelphia. At this summit delegates from across the nation came together to create a platform for our goals as a nation for our young people. They challenged communities to mobilize their commitment to improve the lives of young people by providing five basic resources to all young people.

commitment generation

In many communities, local summits are the kick-off event for the Promise Initiative. At the summits, participants explore how they can support initiatives goals by making either personal or professional commitments. For example, one could commit to mentoring children in the neighborhood or a program can commit to serve 100 more youth next year.

infrastructure: after the summit

Commitments are only one level of the promise initiative. America’s Promise challenges community organizations to coordinate and provide all five resources to all youth, known by name, in their community. It challenges the community to assess what it is currently doing, what is missing, how to connect the youth to resources, and ensure the quality of these connections and resources.

- | |
|---|
| The five basic resources |
| * An ongoing relationship with a caring adult |
| * A safe place with structured activities during non-school hours |
| * A healthy start |
| * A marketable skill through effective education |
| * An opportunity to give back through community service |

schools or sites of promise: Locations where youth can access the promises and “promises are fulfilled in a coordinated way to children and young people know by name

local alliances: Groups agree to work among their own networks to deliver all five promises to youth known by name

commitment strategy: Directs local commitments to the community alliances and sites of promise, increasing their success and impact on youth.

promise resources		
Americas Promise www.americaspromise.org	National Mentoring Partnership www.mentoring.org/	Youth Service America www.ysa.org
Communities In Schools www.cisnet.org	Department of Education www.ed.gov	Afterschool Resources www.afterschool.gov
Corporation for National Service www.nationalservice.org	School to Work www.stw.ed.gov/	Points of Light www.pointsoflight.org

CASE STUDIES

asset building coalition

history:

One of six sites selected for a statewide youth assets initiative funded by regional foundation and the Search Institute. Regional leadership team selected health care system as host agency and full-time coordinator was hired.

geography:

Countywide initiative. Rural and small city populations. Three main population centers:

- Main town: pop 150,000: University town, county seat, multiple social programs
- Middle town: pop. 35,000: Agricultural based, few social programs
- Smaller town: Resort community, pop, 4,000 winter - 40,000 summer. Few social services

age: 2.5 years

focus: Youth asset building

principles: Community mobilization

sectors involved: schools, youth organizations, health services, parents

mission:

- Increase awareness about the assets model
- Mobilize groups to integrate and implement the assets model.
- Increase assets in youth throughout the community

structure:

- Full time Coordinator, AmeriCorps Promise Fellow, 2 part time college interns
- Leadership groups in the three main population areas of the county
- Open and informal membership, special projects ran by ad-hoc voluntary groups

activities: Asset model training, community dialogues, publications, special projects

resources: \$35,000 year plus inkind (office, equipment)—mixed grant budget

outcomes:

- **institutionalization:** Asset model incorporated into organization by-laws and activities
- **mobilization:** People they have trained, Active volunteers: stories, activities
- **community impact:** Impact on youth assets longitudinal study and evaluation by college Masters in Social Work students in progress

challenges: Leadership development, assessing outcomes, geographic scope of initiative

future:

The Coalition is at the end of a 3-year grant. They see three possible scenarios for the coalition.

1. Discontinued because job is done.
2. There is no buy in from the community, initiative is ignored and fails.
3. The community embraces and continues support by establishing funding.

They feel they are between scenario 2 and 3.

Case Studies

caring community initiative

history:

Caring Community Initiative is school/community-based collaboration at neighborhood and county levels. It was founded by the Leaders Roundtable in 1991. Leaders Roundtable is a group representing key leaders in the County's government, educational and community sectors. They are dedicated to research, innovation and systems change to improve the lives of children and families. In 1992, community volunteers began four Caring Communities and Caring Community Steering Committee was established. To date, there are 9 Caring Communities. All Caring Communities have secured resources for a full time coordinator.

age: 9 years

geography:

Countywide. Urban/suburban pop. 1 million. Multiple social services and organizations.

principles: Service integration, collaboration, family focused social services.

focus: Community youth development

sectors involved: Education, social services, justice programs, youth programs, youth, parents, business, higher education

mission:

To change the human services delivery system in a way that will make things better for children and families

structure: Countywide and neighborhood focused.

caring communities (9): FTE Coordinator, Local Steering Committee, Action Teams: Collaboration system, program and project design and implementation.

hosts: School Districts

county support: One FTE Advisor, Leaders Roundtable, Caring Community Steering Committee: (open community membership): Support the plans of the Caring Communities, problem solving and coordination, "barrier busting", advocacy and policy alignment.

activities: Facilitating collaboration, "jump starting" new programs, community forums, family resource centers, school-based programs

resources: \$300,000 annually 9 caring communities

outcomes: Systems integration, capacity building, collaborations

challenges: Capacity for growth, funding, leadership transition

future:

Extensive evaluation conducted in 1999 by independent consultant concluded THE initiative is showing success in progressing toward their goals. Successful projects and high community involvement keeps the collaboration "alive" and evolving. Key issues: Stabilizing funding for coordinator position and improving leadership development and transition.

Case Studies

tri-county mentoring initiative

history:

Initiative began in 1998 with the “Lets Talk Youth” the Tri-County Summit on America’s Promise. Key community leaders, representing the caring adult resource, gave endorsement to developing the initiative. One business representative took leadership. AmeriCorps Promise Fellow brought on to research, build community support, and coordinate the development of the initiative and has continued for a second term to help establish the initiative structure and activities.

geography:

Three Counties: Pop. 1.6 million. Rural, suburban and urban areas. Multiple governments, services, and groups

age: 2 years

focus: Mentoring services

principles: Systems integration, collaboration

sectors involved: Mentoring program managers, mentoring advocates, business community.

mission: Foster the expansion of quality mentoring in the tri-county area. Dedicated to building and supporting tri-county and statewide collaborations to bring quality mentoring to more young people.

structure:

staff 1 FTE AmeriCorps Promise Fellow: (2nd year), 1 Business Leader Volunteer

host: Volunteer Center

forming a Leadership Council: Advocacy and resource development

forming a Providers Council: Service integration, community standards,

forming Mentoring Center: Mentoring clearinghouse

outcomes: Improved services, increased capacity of mentoring programs

activities: To Date: Community assessment, community forums, community mobilization

Creating a mentoring clearinghouse, education materials and quality standards for mentoring programs.

resources: In-kind office space and materials, grant for APF

challenges: Training and mentoring of APF

future:

Although the group has significant support from national and other statewide mentoring initiatives to help guide and support their efforts, the initiative faces the potential challenges of transferring leadership at the end of the Promise Fellow’s term. If they are able to secure the resources for a paid coordinator position this will help secure their future.

Case Studies

youth involvement network

history:

Initiative begun by non-profit organization and corporate partner as a commitment made at the “Lets Talk Youth Summit” tri-county summit on Americas Promise. Coordinator and youth intern hosted community forums to develop the network. In 1999, youth involvement centers were created at 8 High Schools with the support of an AmeriCorps Promise Fellow. Youth interns hired to produce web site and newsletter. Original coordinator replaced Fall 1999.

geography:

Three Counties: Pop 1.6 million. Rural, suburban and urban areas. Multiple services and groups.

age: 1.5 years

principles: Youth partnership, regional coordination,

focus: Youth involvement

sectors involved: Schools, volunteer coordinators, youth, youth program directors, business

mission:

To increase access, opportunity and quality of youth involvement in community affairs.

structure:

staff: 1 FTE Coordinator, 1 America’s Promise Fellow, 4 Youth Interns 1 College work-study

host: Nonprofit organization

advisory board: Youth Adults representing 3 counties, initiative development

community coalition: Informal information exchange and dialogues among volunteer coordinators, youth, youth program directors and educators.

youth involvement centers: Student run centers at High Schools

activities: Clearinghouse, training for youth and adults, community forums, youth journalism.

resources: \$50,000: 2-year corporate donation to host organization, \$30,000 host organization support

outcomes: Community awareness, youth leadership development, community mobilization, improved youth volunteer opportunities

challenges: Autonomy from host agency, leadership development, strategic planning, community mobilization.

future: Host organization pulled support of collaborative planning. Resources shifted to statewide service learning program, integrating some of the initial goals of the network.

Case Studies

links

history:

In 1992, informal group of 8 leaders from key sectors (education, government, social services, and business) created a consensus to create a service system that can better serve the needs of the community. In 1994, a city employee was assigned to developing a model for the group. The “Communities that Care” prevention model was selected. In 1995, they institutionalize the initiative by making funding a line-budget item of each of the eight founding organizations. In 1997 they hired a professional coordinator and administrative assistant to staff the initiative. The coordinators focus was to foster dialogues and collaborations among community groups.

geography:

City wide: pop. 200,000 city within a greater metro area of 3.5 million. Relatively affluent community that is experiencing an increase in population and diversity of community members including children, minorities, and seniors.

age: 9 years

principles: Communities that Care framework, collaboration and capacity building

focus: Improving community services

sectors involved: Neighborhood associations, social service providers, school district, and business.

mission: “sharing responsibilities and resources to create a community which is safe, healthy, and productive for children, adults and families”.

structure:

staff: 1 FTE Executive Director, 1 FTE Assistant

host: Health Care System

leadership council: 8 core community organizations. Funders for initiative.

steering committee: 22 members, Partners in prevention action team co-chairs, Community Liaisons seats representing faith organizations, schools, police and business, executive director and assistant.

general members: partners in prevention: 50 other organizations as members in the General Partnership, open membership. Moving towards formal membership agreements and suggested donations.

outcomes: Institutionalization in funding systems and organizations.

Collaborations norm in community.

activities: Facilitation and administrative support for collaborations, coordinate strategic teams, special projects; community resource directory

resources: \$90,000 cash, \$110,000 in kind, (office space, insurance, and equipment)

challenges: Inclusion of diverse populations: service recipients and cultural groups.

future: Continue to evaluate community impacts in next 3 years.

NETWORK INITIATION

introduction

process of initiation:

A network begins when people decide that a system wide change, encompassing the efforts of many people, is needed. There are three primary stages to initiation described in this section.

catalysts: The spark. It begins with some change in either the environment or in an idea. It is the people who begin the process of collaboration.

mobilization: Efforts begin to build teamwork and mobilize resources (revenue, time, and people) to build a positive environment within the community, overcome potential barriers and begin to mobilize the citizenry to institute change.

grounding: The group adopts a shared understanding of their purpose and values by identifying their vision, mission and principles and outcomes within the context of the attitudes, norms, beliefs and values of the larger community.

“If people want to change the community they need the agreement and support of people in the community, especially those whose behavior they want to influence.”

They work collaboratively because they believe it will be more effective in creating change. The change is their goal and objective.”

triggering conditions for change

- * Change is needed and possible.
- * A group has a vision and ideas about how change can occur.
- * Members are confident that they can achieve goals to move their community closer to the vision.
- * Group members foster collaborative conditions and recruit members who have collaborative skills and agree with vision and mission of the group.
- * Conditions in the community do not prevent the members from taking part in its activities.

questions to ask

- What is wrong?
- Who is affected by this condition?
- Whom should we try to help?
- What do we think should be changed?
- Who should we approach for help in creating this change?
- Whose behavior do we want to influence?
- How shall we try to convince these people and their supporters to develop or adopt this innovation?

Network Initiation

catalysts:

Catalysts get your collaboration started. Generally to begin a collaborative effort two types of catalysts are needed:

two types of catalysts

(1) environment: A community-wide issue viewed by the community as a situation requiring a comprehensive approach.

(2) people: A convener or conveners. The convener(s) begins the initial dialogue about the issue, and helps bring people towards developing alternatives to the situation.

examples of catalysts:

Many factors contribute to the creation of community networks. Following are some of the general types of initiation strategies.

cross interest community leaders: Some networks are created by a group of community leaders from a mix of social services, government, and education came together to support systems integration and capacity building for the entire range of community services these groups offer.

single interest: Other networks are created with the goal of supporting a specific group of program providers and users. These focus on specific approach to community youth development such as mentoring, youth service, and workforce development.

national initiative seed money: In some communities seed money for a campaign, summit and outreach activities is the initial catalyst to network development. Typically some sort of coordinating body is created, a “kick off” event, and follow up support for new initiatives and collaboration.

However the network begins, it is important that the conveners are respected by the community and viewed as having a legitimate role in this endeavor. They must carry out their role with passion and respect, and have good organizational and interpersonal skills.

resources

Center for Community Change
www.communitychange.org

National Community Building Network
www.ncbn.org

National Civic League
www.ncl.org/ncl/index.htm

AspenInstitute Roundtable
www.aspenroundtable.org

Charting Community Connections
www.fourhcouncil.edu/cyd/CCC.htm

NWREL: Rural Education
Strengthening Community Networks
www.nwrel.org/ruraled/

taking small steps

In 1992 key leaders from the school board, city and county government, non-profit organizations and the health care system began the LINKS initiative. They began by talking and acknowledge that they “we should be in the same room at the same time” in order to effect social change. Their first step was to make small steps at changing the way people think.

The goal was to change community perceptions so collaboration could become the new way of acting in the community. It started with gestures as simple and brave as making bright cards with the phrase “It takes a village” printed on it and handing them out at public places from meetings and through fast food drive through windows.

Network Initiation

mobilizing:

Networks begin with a person or group of people set out to improve a community wide situation through long-term collaboration. They begin by identifying what they can do to change the situation. They bring more people into the effort to who can provide support and resources.

In some communities, forming such a group will be the first step. In others communities, an existing group addressing issues of education, health care, or family services, may broaden or refocus its agenda to initiate a network. In either scenario, effective mobilization requires reaching out to the institutions, community and religious groups and business associations that -

- * Have an interested in joining the network
- * Have the greatest potential to benefit from this alliance
- * Have the ability to help fulfill the mission .

Community mobilization occurs when the community recognizes the value of the change, believes in their capacity to act on behalf of the change and is motivated to act on behalf of the cause. People only act upon things that are important to them. Members must place enough value to the purpose of the group in order to commit time and energy to its cause. When beginning a network it is important to make sure the collaborators voice what they want from the effort and future decisions reflect these desires.

Everyone has multiple communities and priorities in their lives. We have our family, our professions, our neighborhood, our hobbies and interests. Like individuals, organizations also have many communities and priorities. The essence of mobilizing community networks is to move the goals of the collaboration to the first level priority for both individuals and groups.

It is important to recognize that is that although not everyone will say “yes” to collaborating today—people will rarely say “no” to the possibility of joining sometime in the future. Often they are waiting to see how successful the activities are before investing their energy and time. They will come on board when they see how others benefit or when the opportunity is right for their organization.

who to recruit?

People comfortable with working in groups and developing new ideas.

People who have influence in the community for making decisions and allocating resources.

People who have frequent and easy contact with each other. They live or work in similar environments.

People who want to join!!!!

four kinds of motivation

self oriented motivations:
benefits of participation (skills, networking, financial gain, get out of office, personal relationships)

desire for group success:
pride in achievement of group goal

desire to benefit others:
motivated by benefits to people outside of group

desire to benefit the community:
motivated by improvement of the community.

Network Initiation

grounding:

Establishing the foundation of the group allows the uniqueness of the collaborative effort to become clear. Each network needs to go through a process of defining their vision, mission and goals. Using network models designed elsewhere can only be successfully transferred when they are adapted to the particular community. The grounding process helps avoid duplication of efforts, turf conflicts, and disenfranchising the community members. It defines the niche the network fills and its role in the community.

The **VISION** is the portrait of the desired future condition. While the desired outcome may be defined as “to have a safe and secure community,” the vision expresses how the community will look when that outcome is realized.

examples

“Every young person has access to the positive support from one or more role models.”

“All of our citizens contribute to the safety of our community, they respect people and places, protect the investments they make, and safeguard their sense of security.”

“All youth are active citizens recognized and valued by the community.”

The **MISSION** is the purpose of the collaborative effort. The mission states the fundamental reason for the collaboration’s existence, who benefits from it, and how.

example

“To challenge barriers that impede coordination and flexibility in providing collaborative support and integrated service delivery systems that serve as bases for community access to social, emotional, mental, medical, physical, health, educational and economic well being”

The **VALUES and PRINCIPLES** are the beliefs commonly held by the group. They serve as guides for reaching outcomes and working relationships and describe how the group operates on a regular basis.

examples

Collaboration, community building, youth involvement.

grounding questions

1. What is the best possible improvement you can imagine in this community?
2. What past efforts to change things in this community have turned out well?
3. Try to achieve a consensus or single view of the what the community will be like after the desired change is made
4. Identify what changes in institutions, culture, and other social structures need to occur for this vision to happen?
5. How would these changes be achieved?
6. What can we do now to begin to reach our vision?

sound bytes

In order to communicate your group’s role in the community there needs to be a short, sound byte that all members of the group can use to explain who they are and what they are trying to do.

example

LINKS...is a collaborative network of individuals and organizations that provides a framework for conducting community needs assessment, creating shared strategies to address those needs, and developing a system for evaluating and measure community results.

SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

introduction

Creating community networks requires developing a system of how people will work together. Developing this system requires the group to make decisions about the structure and the processes of the network.

network system

structure:

Who is involved and what are their roles and responsibilities.

process:

How the group makes decisions and plans in order to achieve their goals.

Networks develop structures that match the complexity and scale of the community. The decisions made in systems development reflect the unique history, environment, relationships among organizations and unique energies and talents of members.

In many networks, the structure is organized to recognize the multiple spheres of influences different groups and organizations have in the community. The system is complex so the group can simultaneously effect changes in policy and institutions, in individual perceptions and motivations, communication systems, program development and service delivery.

The process of developing network systems requires organizing and recruiting members, defining roles and responsibilities and planning strategies for achieving the mission.

resources

community building

Civic Practises Network

<http://www.cpn.org/>

Asset Based Community Development Institute

<http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/abcd.html>

National Civic league

<http://www.ncl.org/anr/>

Community Tool Box:

<http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/>

leadership

Drucker Foundation: Leader to Leader Journal

<http://www.pfdf.org/leaderbooks/L2L/index.html>

Independent Sector

<http://www.independentsector.org/programs/leadership/leaders.html>

management

The Alliance For Nonprofit Management

<http://www.allianceonline.org/>

Free Management Library

<http://www.mapnp.org/library/index.html>

Center for Excellence in Nonprofits

<http://www.cen.org/>

System Development

group organization

How networks organize themselves depends largely on what they are trying to achieve. These goals determine how formal or informal the roles, responsibilities and relationships of members. The strategies of group organization often change over time. Many networks begin as informal information sharing groups and then develop more structure as the initiative becomes integrated within the community.

Formal groups have defined roles and relationships stated and agreed to in by-laws and membership agreements. These groups have designated leadership, agreements on length and frequency of participation. For community networks that focus on integration of services, formal groups help provide the consistency of participation and decision making needed for coordination and comprehensive planning.

Informal groups are more flexible in their definition of roles and responsibilities. Often they have open membership, defined roles tend to be limited to administrative tasks (recorder, facilitator), and there is no formal expectation of participation. Network groups that primarily focus on education and information sharing use informal groups to maximize the exposure of community members to network goals.

Most networks have both formal and informal groups. They use informal groups as the platform for more formal committees and action groups. Members are expected to take responsibility when they are needed and they can do it. If the group moves into a more active role, a core leadership group is formed out of who has the special skills, knowledge and resources (time) to direct the efforts. Often they establish formal councils to provide long term support for the network.

types of groups: informal to formal

type I

- Dialog and common understanding
- Clearinghouse for information
- Used to create base of support
- Non-hierarchical
- Roles loosely defined
- Low key leadership
- Minimal decision making
- Informal communication
- Links among groups are advisory

type II

- Match needs and provide coordination
- Limit duplication of services
- Group leverages/raises money
- Facultative leaders
- Formal communications within the central group
- Share resources to address common issues
- Central body of people consists of decision-makers
- Roles defined
- Group decision making in central and subgroups

type III

- Share ideas and be willing to pull resources from existing systems
- Develop long range commitment
- All members involved in decision making
- Group develops new resources and joint budget
- Shared leadership
- Decision making formal
- Communication is common and prioritized
- Build interdependent system to address issues and opportunities
- Member roles and responsibilities formalized and written in work assignments

System Development

group organization

Many network structures are based on a layering of roles and responsibilities throughout the entire community. One way to look at networks is to think of it as a multitude of committees who have authority to perform different functions for the group as a whole. Some of the groups are long term while some emerge and disperse based on need. Some focus solely on the community wide level, some only on the neighborhood scale, while others are developed as the bridge between the two. Multiple layers of decision-making points helps to provide maximum participation without hampering the ability of the group to plan, interact and take direction.

examples of network groups

advisory groups

Advisory group members represent key community sectors; government, education, non-profits, faith groups and business. This group works to “bust” identified barriers to the success of the network mission by aligning their activities and organizations to support the efforts. They also help identify and leverage new resources, provide expertise and support to community assessment, and policy recommendations. Advisory groups are often made up of 10-15 members who meet 2-5 times a year.

coordinating groups

Coordinating groups may have open membership or selected membership; however, the critical issue is the representation of the key sectors of both the strategic and grassroots level. Some networks have two sets of coordinating groups, one working on the community wide scale and others working specific neighborhood or interest area. These groups plan the network activities including systems integration, standards of practice and coordination, and information sharing mechanisms. Coordinating groups range from 15-50 members and meet once or twice a month.

action groups

Action groups can be standing or ad hoc groups that focus on a specific project or goal of the network. Many networks require action teams to be made up of at least one member of the coordinating group and one member of the community. Action groups are made of 2-15 people and meet monthly or more depending on the project.

fiscal agents:

Fiscal agents are organizations that have responsibility for managing network finances. If the network is not established as its own non-profit then a designated fiscal agent is needed. Examples of fiscal agents include: School districts, health organizations, volunteer centers, youth programs. A fiscal agent should be viewed as an equal partner of the network.

resources

Citizens Handbook

<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/>

Sustainable Communities Network

http://www.sustainable.org/creating/community_index.html

Pew Partnership for Civic Change

<http://www.pew-partnership.org/research/index.html>

System Development

member involvement

Community networks are built upon the mobilizing the assets of community members and groups. Two broad questions need to be asked when beginning the recruitment process of network membership:

1. What 'pockets' or networks of people make up our community?
2. What kinds of skills and backgrounds do we need?

Levels of involvement will depend on how important the project is to their organization or personal interest and how well they feel their skills and influence can support the effort. Often this dynamic is seen in the first round of network meetings. Many will show at the beginning and filter out after a time. This does not necessarily mean they do not support the efforts, they may be just saving their energies for activities that are better suited to their interests and resources. Many networks host kick off retreats at the beginning of the year to identify emerging plans and activities. Here members can self select their level of involvement for the upcoming year. It is important to remember that if people are allowed to do what they do best and if their tasks are clear, then effective participation and collaboration is enabled.

"People aren't looking for ways to give up their time, but they are looking for ways to enrich their lives."

volunteer management

Energize: www.energize.com
Ebooks: www.energizeinc.com/art/electbooks.html

Points of Light
www.pointsoflight.org

ARNOVA www.arnova.org

Association for Volunteer Administration www.avaintl.org

CyberVPM
www.cyberVPM.com

Service Leader
www.serviceleader.org

steps to quality involvement

planning: Planning is an assessment of the goals, the anticipated outcomes, and the needs for involving members in the network activities. What would be accomplished by participants? What would be expected of participants? What can participants expect from the organization?

recruitment: Effective recruitment matches the participants role with their skills, availability, and interests. It is the coordinators role to help members identify what they want to do and what they are able to contribute to the group.

training: Training simply is ensuring that the person responsible for the task is equipped to do the work—demonstrating the proper way to work with a database or to facilitate a meeting. No matter what the level of skill, intensity or commitment needed, every person needs to feel comfortable in the role they are fulfilling.

participation: Participation is the activities members engage in. Coordinators should always pay attention to whether the activities are meaningful and impactful to the group as well as to the member.

recognition and celebration: The chance to build community among members by acknowledging the work done. Celebration is a time for group recognition of the contributions individuals make and their roles within the network. It is also a time to relax, share food and have fun. Recognition and celebration should be ongoing throughout the life of the group.

evaluation: Ongoing feedback and assessment from the members. In order to assess the quality of participation it is important to develop a consistent and open means for discussing roles and responsibilities.

System Development

Leadership

The community youth development approach challenges traditional concepts of “leadership.” Commonly “community leaders” are thought of as the person “in charge” (the CEO, the general, the president) who controls decision making through a hierarchy or “chains of command”.

Traditional conceptions of leadership believe that a leader is someone graced with extraordinary personal qualities of charisma, judgment, decision making, and persuasion.

The community youth development approach redefines leadership as a quality of all community members. It is not a quality of the few in power or born with natural talent. Leadership comes from a commitment to visions, experience and wisdom. The skills of communication, decision making and persuasion can be learned once the passion to lead a group to a vision has been tapped into.

Community leadership can be divided spheres of leaders, divided geographically, demographically, and by interests and skills. Individuals have influence at different points in the community and in different subjects and interest. One simple way of looking at it is that every community has pockets of strategic and grassroots leadership. Strategic leadership is a group of community members that have significant name recognition and power based on their position and reputation in the community. These individuals have connections and influence throughout the community and access to resources such as money, policy makers ears, media contacts, and a high source of “people” resources.

Grassroots leadership stems from the local service providers, youth, teachers and parents. This is the level of implementation where the people working on the initiative are closest to the impact. They are people with the knowledge and skills to carry out and support the day to day deliverables of the initiative.

Community networks recognize the richness of community leadership by developing different roles and responsibilities for their members. Mobilization is inclusive: everyone is a key player if they have made a commitment to building assets within their sphere of influence. An individual or organization may take leadership in certain areas and be less active in others.

three sources of leadership

personality: ability to motivate others to action

knowledge: understanding the skills and techniques required for action

role: the responsibilities and power ascribed to the position you hold in the community.

leadership references

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System Development

planning for action

If the group just talks about the issue and assumes that people will automatically change behavior then the group is being over optimistic. They must decide on methods to getting people to change and that takes a plan. Establishing a plan gives direction to network activities improves collaboration by focusing attention on a common purpose and achievable outcomes. A plan provides a reminder of the entire array of activities, timing, and responsibilities.

The community building approach also redefines the way we approach planning. Instead of focusing on problems to be solved or needs to be fulfilled, this approach looks at the assets or environmental and individual supports that can be mobilized to produce alternatives that will improve the community. Planning a course of action then is a process of asking, what do have to work with in our community and what alternatives can we envision that will improve our current situation.

community assessment

Community assessment gathers data about the characteristics and needs of the community. It helps to determine the scope and accessibility of services and supports now available to families and youth.

goals and objectives

A goal is an end to which people direct their efforts. Goals provide the motivation and direction for the group to grow and develop in the ways they want. Goals are written statements that define the outcomes the group want to accomplish.

Goals usually come early in the process because people are brought together with specific ideas for change. However, defining goals and objectives can be difficult because people do not know enough about the situation, the options, or what would work best. They may need to engage in community assessment before creating a plan.

planning elements

community assessment:

Interview youth, parents, service providers, and schools to pinpoint key supports and challenges in the community.

goals:

Establish and prioritize immediate, short and long term goals. Goals can be prioritized by: *Essential goals* are those that need to be done. *Improvement goals* are ones that ought to be done. *Innovation goals* are goals that would be nice to do

objectives:

Determine the tactics or activities used to achieve the goals

action plan:

Define the steps, procedures, work assignments and deadlines

standard of performance:

Measures the progress towards the goal. Groups can set minimal, acceptable and outstanding standards

resources:

Identifying the resources (money, skills, time, materials) needed to achieve goals

obstacles:

Identify constraints and develop contingency plans

System Development

tips for successful planning

balance process and outcomes

One of the primary lessons of collaborative planning is the need to balance the groups focus on the decision making process and the outcomes of that process. Different people approach planning in different ways. Some people are very outcome focusing on the tasks of the projects, or “what will be done. They often want action to begin right away with little time spend on planning. Others are more focused on the process of planning, how the decisions are made and who is responsible for implementation. Recognizing how individuals approach planning and balancing the two approaches helps ensure that the planning process is effective.

outcome focus

Focusing too much on planning outcomes can undermine the development of a long-term network structure. Network development requires time for individuals and groups to identify their role in the initiative and to develop the commitment needed to implement strategies. The first year of many community initiatives are spent in dialogue about community assets; sharing strategies and mobilizing support not directing or creating community services.

One challenge for allowing networks the time to develop appropriate planning strategies is the pressure on coordinators to provide immediate results. This is especially true for Corporation for National Service members or any other limited term coordinator.. Time pressure can lead to the coordinator having to make decisions without the full involvement of community members. Speeding the process so that the group is committed to activities that have not been deliberated upon can lead to stress associated to picking the wrong objectives and not having the skills to undertake actions.

process focus

For others, the planning process is the key to group activity Some are primarily concerned with balancing power among participants. They use group procedures to balance process so that those individuals with more expertise, influences and assertiveness do not overshadow the rest of the group.

Focusing solely on process may lead the group to pay so much attention to how decisions are made and how people are involved that the group never moves to a level of action. People tend to get frustrated and bored if there are no tangible projects or impacts of the group. Another danger of focusing only on process is that people may select goals and actions that keep members happy over one the one that are most sensible. In order to flush out workable goals and strategies people need to evaluate alternatives and critically examine any ideas that conflict with selected alternatives. The group may want to assign a devils advocate role to one of their members and or discuss ideas with people outside of group.

planning resources

Academy for Educational Development, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research

www.aed.org/us/cyd/cym/cym.html

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. “Mapping Community Assets Workbook” Downloadable from

www.nwrel.org/ruraled/

Community Tool Box:

<http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/>

Free Management Library

<http://www.mapnp.org/library/index.html>

System Development

tips for successful planning

focus of learning

Planning begins to challenge the ways people have done things in the past. People may sense a need to change but they do not want to face conflict or problems that may arise from implementing the change. They are afraid of failure and the risks involved in an ambiguous future.

Providing the safety and support for people to risk change is a key role of defining the planning process. Some will resist other people trying to get them to do things differently. It is critical to focus on changing what people do not who they are. Reinforcing desired behaviors and focusing on learning will minimize defensiveness and encourages people to be open to change.

No matter how good the plan sound in the beginning every plan has to go through modification. If the group becomes so committed to a set of activities they may not be evaluating whether that activity is truly serving that goal. It is difficult for anyone to admit that their plan didn't not work, especially if it has been developed through a long and deliberate process involving many people and many discussions. All that time invested and an inherent faith in consensual decision making makes it difficult to scrap the plan

The more people gain experience in community building the more they will develop new concepts and experiences that will point to new alternatives and opportunities. Being too tied to your process and the outcomes from the initial planning process may keep the group from seeing obstacles and alternatives. It is important to continually monitor and review the activities to make sure they are moving the group closer to the desired outcomes.

Planning is a process of learning and adjusting rather than a process that is expected to solve a specific issue. Planning as an on-going process recognizes the reality and complexity of community change. Planning needs to be open-minded and flexible, encourage change and modification, clarify images of reality, enhance visions of the future and gauge the successes of the group efforts.

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ACTION

Introduction

One of the primary guidelines for network activities is to tie their activities to what community groups have to do anyway including research, program planning, community outreach, recruitment, and training. The strength of community networks is to create ways for network members to engage in these activities more effectively and with more impact by doing them collaboratively rather than individually.

There are three common categories of network action.

convening activities:

Planning and hosting community forums and events

educating activities:

Research and training

system activities:

systems to communicate, organize, leverage and disseminate network resources

Many times community networks do pieces of all these activities with some as primary activities and some as episodic. For example, a community network focusing on mentoring may place most of its attention around being a clearinghouse and training resource for mentoring programs. They often collaborate on special projects including research on effective mentoring practices, advocacy to corporations for employee mentor programs. New projects and opportunities will arise, so although not all of these activities may be appropriate now they may be in the future.

roles of network members in community projects

Fiscal agent or funder

Project director (in charge of implementation)

Project planner (not in charge of implementation)

Project facilitator or convener (bringing people together)

Project support staff (securing resources, support, volunteers)

Project advisor/consultant

need more hands? internet volunteer recruitment

Community Action Network
www.getinvolved.net/

Servenet
www.servenet.org/

Impact Online
www.impactonline.org

Action

role of organizers

When looking at network activities is critical to separate the action of the organizer or network administrators from the action of the collaborators. The organizer provides the glue that lets action happen.

Their role is to facilitate and help take on some of the headache (administrative tasks) of the collaborative efforts. Primary activities include facilitating collaborative planning, leveraging resources (volunteers, space, et.) fostering new collaborative efforts, and information dissemination. The distinction of coordinator activities and network activities has important philosophical and practical implications.

Philosophically, community networks are based on all members making a commitment to working towards a common vision. Member responsibility for network actions is the base of community ownership. If all responsibility for action is placed upon the organizer than the initiative is not a community collaboration, it is a program. If the organizer keeps reminding group it is their role to facilitate the collaboration not to make the collaboration happen, then ownership becomes ingrained in the group. This approach strengthens neutrality and integration and reduces suspicions that the coordinator is working to support certain interests or sectors over others.

For example, many time coordinators are asked by members to be responsible for who attends collaborative meetings. One organizer facing this situation, made it clear to the group that they were responsible for their own invitations. In this situation the coordinator felt it was necessary to insulate himself from the turf wars and competition influencing the selection of participants. If someone is missing from the conversation it was not the coordinator's role to make sure the group invited him or her. However, the coordinator believed it was appropriate to raise the question, as part of modeling the collaborative process "Is there anyone missing from this conversation"?

On the practical side, network administration is often the responsibility of a few individuals; it is impractical to expect them to have the resources to do everything. Few network administrators have the people or the funding to implement the wide range of activities needed to mobilize the community to the scale that will transform the way communities serve their young people. The ability to separate the role of organizers from collaborators keeps the organizer responsibilities manageable and maintains the neutrality of the initiative by stressing community ownership.

motto:

It's the collaborators that collaborate

philosophy:

Action happens because collaborators take action

Action

convening activities: introduction

Networks use forums and events as a means to educate participants about ideas, practices and to foster the development of collaborative systems across groups.

forums

Forums are dialogue spaces. These can be regularly scheduled information sharing or collaborative planning meetings or special gatherings to respond to an emergent community issue. Many times forums are used to launch action teams. At the end of these events members are asked to make commitments of how to support the ideas created by the group. However, not all forums result in action. Sometimes the community just needs to have a place to talk.

For example, one network hosted a forum to address community concern about a series of crimes that occurred at their high school. They hosted a forum that was well attended by students, school staff, and parents. The dialogue was charged and directed to issues of accountability, youth stereotypes, and police community relations. When asked if the group wanted to take action on the discussion they felt that they had gained closure on the immediate issue and no further meetings were needed.

events

Events tend to be larger in scale than forums. They may be one-time, annual or semiannual activities that last for a half day or longer. They tend to be more diverse activities than forums and involve more participants. They include community trainings, planning retreats, recognition ceremonies and community service projects.

Steps to planning a forum or event

identify purpose and objective:

Who is the audience?

Why should people attend?

plan the activities:

What will happen when people are there?

gather resources:

Space, speakers, materials, food.

recruit participants:

Announcements and registration materials.

evaluate and follow-up:

Participant and event planners evaluations,

Thank-you letters

Summary of session and outcomes.

online event managers

Create invitations and online RSVP materials

Yahoo Invites

<http://invite.yahoo.com>

Activespace

<http://www.activespace.com>

Action

convening activities: facilitation

Network coordinators often act as facilitators of community forums and collaborative meetings. Facilitation is the process of assisting groups in decision making or other group processes. A facilitator is a neutral guide that helps move the group to a common consensus. The facilitator helps the group explore their differences in values and principles. They help to uncover what may be conflicts in underlying values and principles and what might be conflicts in the ways language is being used.

Facilitation does not mean that the coordinator refrains from any input into the process. At times they will gather information about the issues to help the group make more informed decisions, at other times they bring experts to present to the group before decisions are made. For example, the facilitator may use community statistics to start conversations by asking—“what does this say about our community and our social programs?” They may bring up issues that are of concern in the community; however, they do refrain from stating their own position on the issue.

Facilitation techniques are based on opening discussion to a wide array of ideas and then narrowing the group ideas through prioritizing and synthesis of similar ideas. The process begins with the brainstorming of as many ideas regarding the topic of the group session. The main rule is that all ideas, however impractical, are to be given equal weight. The ideas are posted for all members to see.

After the group gets a list of ideas they go through a process of deciding which ideas to support. The group can eliminate options, prioritize ideas by weighing the consequences of each idea and find those that most support the goals of the group. Creating an open dialogue to problem solving gives the group a wide array of alternative approaches to their issues, which in turn, will help them select a more appropriate approach than if they only had a few alternatives to select from.

brainstorming techniques

- ❖ Individuals write multiple ideas on paper, all ideas are posted.
- ❖ Round Robin each person says one idea until everyone has spoken.
- ❖ Open floor with everyone, in any order, providing as many ideas as possible

communication skills

Solid eye communication

Good posture

Be relaxed and natural when you speak

Dress and appear appropriate for the environment you are in

Effective use of voice and vocal variety

Effective use of language and pauses.

Engage audience and be responsive to their energy

Use humor to create bond and use stories to paint pictures

Action

convening activities: open space technology

Open space is one approach to facilitation used in many collaborative groups. In this process the participants create the agenda during the beginning of the session. This method is useful for starting a discussion on an issue with groups that do not regularly meet together but have a common interest, such as adolescents and senior citizens meeting about improving recreational activities at a community center. It differs from an open dialogue in that it has an organized format for people to develop their agenda and participate in topics important to the members. Open space fosters people to be creative, innovative and cooperative.

steps of open space

Invite all of the people who are concerned and interested in the topic or theme. Assemble the group in a circle for the opening and closing. Introduce the rules of open space at the beginning of the session.

The first step is to create a “marketplace of ideas” The facilitator tapes a large piece of paper to a wall and hands out post-it notes for participants who write down what they want to discuss. People with a discussion topic place their post-its on the marketplace paper. For example, the youth/seniors group may want to discuss topics ranging from community center hours, diversity of activities, or community outreach.

These topics become the focus of small groups meetings. The group may decide to consolidate some topics into broader categories if they identify a significant similarities. Once people have proposed discussion topics and posted them on the board, everyone chooses a group to participate in. The groups meet at the same time, with the person initiating the topic as the facilitator and another group member as recorder. Participants can move from group to group and join the discussion any time during the process.

Although small group meetings can be as long or short as they need to be (even several days), set a time for the whole group to return for the closing. At closing groups share their experiences, common themes or action steps. All participants receive a copy of the notes from the group sessions.

rules of open spaces:

Whoever comes are the right people

“This is a group that can make a difference”

Whatever happens is all that could have

“What ever the group decides is the best they could achieve.”

Whenever it starts is the right time

When it is over, it is over

“Process is fluid, people begin and end when they are ready.”

The Law of Two Feet:

“Participants take responsibility for what they care about by participating in the discussions they are interested in.”

facilitation resources

Open Space Institute
www.openspaceworld.org/

Study Circles Resource Center
www.studycircles.org/

Hunter, D., et al. 1995.

Action

educating activities: introduction

Networks engage in community education for two primary reasons.

1. Educate the community about the philosophy of collaboration and the goals and activities of the network.

2. Build the skills and capacity of community members to support network goals.

In the day to day interactions, network members model the attitudes and the basic principles of facilitation and collaboration. This helps community members develop a common understanding of the roles and aspirations of different community groups and the network as a whole. The outcome of community education is that organizations understand that they should not overlap the activities of other organizations.

When community has an understanding of the unique roles of organizations, and they understand and accept the purposes and programs, the skills of the staff in that area and the unique culture, principles and policies of other organizations. This understanding reduces turf issues, sets an environment of mutual cooperation. What is required is an openness to ask questions, to clarify the differences, and to work through the best ways of making dissimilar systems work together.

research and training

Networks also use educating techniques to build the capacity of members to be more effective in their work and to provide information to the entire community. They do this by conducting research on community issues, documenting community resources and providing training on best practices

how to diffuse an idea

Help potential adopters become aware that their current practices are not wholly satisfactory and they need to be changed.

Tell people about new practices available to meet their needs and about where they can learn these better procedures if they wish to do so.

Help listeners identify the causes of problems in their own situations

Assist people in defining the best solutions for their particular difficulties.

Get people to commit themselves to the use of a procedure that appears to be a remedy for their situation

Aid committed persons in their efforts to translate this new plan into action

Follow up with each individual in later months, to be sure that the new practice is working and to help him or her establish a continuing routine.

Achieve a clear termination of the relationship when adopters have confidence in implementing the new method.

Rodgers, E. 1983.

Action

educating activities: research

Community networks can play a unique role in gathering information about the community as a whole. They can find out what resources are in the community, statistical trends, help identify what needs to be done and best practices for program implementation. Some of this information they can obtain from other sources, such as census information, outcome evaluations of specific techniques (mentoring, service learning et.) and best practices from programs in other locations. Some research is community specific requiring the group to create their own research techniques and results.

Conducting research can be very expensive and can require a high level of expertise to manage and analyze the information. It is a good idea to find support from academic or professional research organizations. Even simple surveys can be expensive to distribute and very time consuming to evaluate the results. There are however a number of free online tools that can help create, distribute and evaluate community surveys.

The expense of conducting research makes it very important to identify what information already exists before embarking on a research project. To keep abreast on the state of community youth development it is a good idea to subscribe to newsletters and email updates of national groups. These groups post regular updates on projects throughout the country.

"One of the keys to our network's success has been the data driven nature of the organization on behalf of the entire community."

research resources

Children, Youth and Families
Education and Research Network
www.cyfernet.mes.umn.edu/

The National Clearinghouse on
Families and Youth
www.ncfy.com

Connect for Kids
go to their reference room for
reports on the state of youth
www.connectforkids.org

Search Institute
www.searchinstitute.org

Loka Institute
[www.loka.org/crn/pubs/
comreprt.htm](http://www.loka.org/crn/pubs/comreprt.htm)

Kids Count
www.aecf.org/kidscount/

The State of America's Children
Yearbook 2000
[www.childrensdefense.org/
greenbook00.html](http://www.childrensdefense.org/greenbook00.html)

Enterprise Resource Database
[www.enterprisefoundation.org/
register/register_intro.asp](http://www.enterprisefoundation.org/register/register_intro.asp)

research support

Online surveys

Zoomerang:
www.zoomerang.com

Activespace:
www.activespace.com

Formsite:
www.formsite.com

Bitlocker
www.bitlocker.com

Link Research:
linking nonprofits and
academics
www.LINKResearch.org

Action

educating activities: training

Providing training to community members is a common activity of networks. Training may be on broad concepts of community youth development and collaboration or more skill specific such as facilitation techniques or evaluation tools. In any training there are some key points to remember in order to maximize the participants learning.

know your audience:

Who are they and what do they want to get out of the training?
What are their skill levels? What will they do with the information?
What is their culture? For example, although it is always good to be environmentally conscience trainer, with groups more sensitive to this, using overheads instead of flip charts, recycled paper, and reusable cups and plates is a good idea for keeping the group focused on the learning.

understand learning styles:

People learn through different methods, some by reading information, hearing information or applying the information.

There are verbal methods of lecture, discussion, brainstorming, and problem solving to more visual methods such as skits, role-playing, demonstration and practice. In order to reach the entire audience it is important to use a mix of presentation techniques, and formats.

When working with adult learners it is important to tap into the experiences of the participants and allow them to integrate concepts into practical applications. They are interested in gaining knowledge that is useful to them. Using interactive techniques is one way to allow the participants to explore the information from their perspectives.

develop contingency plans:

No matter how well you plan things may go wrong. You should always be prepared to change game plans in case any of the following happens to you.

- *Expecting 30 and you get 5*
- *Equipment fails*
- *Space is wrong for activities*
- *Co trainer comes down sick*

learning styles

auditory learners:

Learn best by listening and offering spoken feedback.

visual learners:

Learn best by reading and having visuals of ideas and practices.

hands-on-learners:

Learn best by applying learning to practice.

training resources

National Service Research Center
www.etr.org/nsrc/online_docs.html

Adult Learning Articles
www.newhorizons.org/lrn_businessind.html

Small Group Trainings
www.etr.org/nsrc/mosaica/trainingbrief3.html

National Training Calendar
www.etr.org/nsrc/calendar.html

Vineyard, S. 1995.

Action

systems activities: introduction

The network ability to integrate activities of community groups is one of the primary ways network leverage resources for programs. If programs are able to collaborate on key activities such as recruitment, training and service provision they have more resources to engage in other activities. They then can look at ways to improve their services through identifying barriers and developing new resources for network members.

One example of system integration is using a joint registration system for youth volunteers. Many programs require volunteers to sign a waiver before volunteering. However, volunteers under 18 must get parental signatures before participating. This severely limits the ability for youth to volunteer “spontaneously” at “drop-in” volunteer events and days of service. Episodic volunteer projects are a gate-way to long term civic involvement and often youth attend these projects while out with friends not necessarily knowing that they need to get waivers signed before hand. One proposal developed by network members was for “Youth Volunteer Cards” with parental signatures, medical contact information and a listing of participating agencies that would accept the card at any of their events.

Systems activities includes the creating of systems to communicate, organize, leverage and disseminate network resources.

The system might be focus on the entire community and be issue oriented or it might be site-based centers. The key to system development is to have multiple points of access for everyone. Site based and community based clearinghouses and centers should be balanced so all community members can participate.

clearinghouse and community centers:

Clearinghouses provide one-stop access to information about childcare, schools, health care, social services, and a wide range of other community resources. It is a cluster of resources and services linked together so that more people gain access to essential information and services.

Community centers are the physical hubs of the clearinghouse. They are where the community goes to get the information. the center is responsible for referring and matching potential volunteers to programs. Centers are also responsible for developing an effective tracking and follow-up system to volunteer matching and service provision.

Often centers are located in schools since schools have more access to children than other organizations, have better data on children and often realize more quickly than other agencies the need for interagency cooperation. For children and youth that are not in school providing social services on school grounds can still make sense since they are found in locations where these youth live.

resources

Community In Schools
www.cisnet.org

Partners in Education
www.partnersineducation.org

National Network of Partnership Schools
www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/

Community Learning Centers
www.newhorizons.org/articlecommmlrning.html
[articles and links](#)

Youth and Community Cirriculms
www.fourhcouncil.edu/ycc/guidexplo1.htm

references

Chaskin, R.J., Richman, H.A. 1992.
Gardner, S.L. 1992.
Gomby, D., Larson, C.S. 1992.

Action

system activities: informing

Communication from the collaboration to the broader community must be established in order to obtain community support and provide information to community members. Developing materials to inform the community about resources, trends and new practices is the practical end to conducting community research. This information can be disseminated through multiple media outlets including print, newspaper articles, video, television, radio and the Internet. Materials are provided to members through mailings, booths at community events, placement at community offices such as libraries, schools, medical offices and community centers. In addition to these resources, networks also need to develop working relationships with the media and other formal information channels.

websites:

Designing a community website is one means to integrate the activities of groups in one central place. The resources needed to design a website will depend on how complex or how much information and interaction the site will provide users. Network web sites may include any of the following: resource directory, volunteer matching systems, community calendar, community surveys, and success stories of community groups. A community group designing a website can find support from High schools, colleges, and business to recruit tech-savvy volunteers or interns for the project. Additionally, some Internet Service Providers host community web pages for no charge.

listservs:

A listserv is a mailing list of people who communicate about their common interests through Internet email. A mailing list or listserv is generally a forum where people post information or discussion topics. Listservs are easier to manage than a mailing list since the participants are responsible for their subscription and for the information posted.

communication resources

Benton Foundtion Online Organizing
www.benton.org/Practice/Toolkit/

Benton Foundation
www.helping.org/nonprofit

Nonprofits' Policy & Technology Project
www.ombwatch.org/npt/

Technology Tip Sheet for Non Profits
www.coyotecom.com/tips.html

Community Network Movement: Online
Communities
www.scn.org/ip/commnet/

The Right Reason
www.therightreason.com

Glass Spider
www.glasspider.com/tangledweb/

E-Groups
www.egroups.com

Action

System activities: resource development

collaborative funding:

One of the strengths of community networks is their ability to bring organizations and individuals together to apply for collaborative funding. Many funders are beginning to require programs to participate in collaborations or collaborative groups. They view programs that participate in these efforts as being better informed and more likely to develop needed services rather than duplicating existing services. Although participation in the collaboration may initially be to fulfill a grant requirement many of the groups remain within the network even after the grant cycle is complete.

Unfortunately, many times the goals and outcomes of systems development, capacity building, service integration are not understood by all funders. Funders often prefer funding “issue oriented” projects instead of “methods” or “approaches”. It is therefore much more difficult to make a case for “capacity building” as it is for “keeping kids in schools”. There is a need for funding organizations to understand that creating community networks is a long term process which needs opportunities to grow and spread, to test and fail, change and collaborate, and room to maneuver - all of which takes patient money.

resource proposal elements

- * Identify a compelling issue or problem
- * Present a well-developed case for the proposed solution backed up with evidence,
- * Lay out a clear strategy and plan for how the work will get done and demonstrate the capacity to do it
- * Have the necessary partners and use memoranda of understanding to document agreements
- * Build in credible evaluation system
- * Incorporate long-range planning for the project, including where the money to sustain the work will come from

funding resources

Communiserve: Helps non-profits find grant resources Good list of funding sources

www.communiserve.com/grant.htm

Department of Education Grants

www.ed.gov/pubs/promisinginitiatives/

Community Tool Box: Writing grant proposals:

www.ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/assistance/MegaTools/Grant/

Grassroots Fundraising Journal

<http://www.chardonpress.com/>

fundraising using the internet

Idealist:

www.idealist.org/beth.html

Putnam Barber :

www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/misc/990804olfr.html

Changemakers:

<http://www.changemakers.net/index.cfm>

E-Fund: Online newsletter on Internet Funding

<http://www.rickchrist.com/efund.htm>

references

Weiss, H. and ME Lopez. 1999 .

EVALUATION

introduction

Many organizers site evaluation as one of the most difficult activities to undertake. The language, concepts and methods of evaluation can seem very complex and technical.

However, evaluation is simply taking a critical look at the purposes, activities and impacts of the effort.

Intuitively, people want to learn at least three things from an evaluation:

What did we do?

Did it have the impact we wanted?

Is what we did the best way to do it?

Evaluation is a deliberate process undertaken at different times and for different purposes. Evaluation may be to help implementation by determining if the group is delivering the services it intended to deliver and if those services are reaching the intended audience. Evaluation is also used to prove the effectiveness of a given approach in order to gain support for funding, expand services, or a spin-off of an existing program in a new site.

evaluation design

Evaluation design is the way or the process evaluators chose to answer their questions. An evaluation design defines the why, what, and how of their evaluation. The design process describes the following:

What are we going to evaluate?

Which indicators do we measure?

What tools and process do we use to collect and analyze the information?

what:

The scope of evaluation can range from the effectiveness of a workshop to the impact on the community. A comprehensive design layers and builds upon each of these complementary yet distinct evaluation focuses.

scope of evaluations

single activity

Single event: workshop evaluations

Multiple event: training program

multiple activities

Goal accomplishment: Evaluation of activities that support specific goals

Mission accomplishment: Evaluation of all the activities of a group

community impact

Contributions to change in community

evaluation design

example

what: Do our activities match our goals?

how:

- * Select the goal(s) to be evaluated.
- * Outline the activities that support that goal.
- * Design measurements to evaluate the activity
- * Design method for getting and analyzing information

example

what: Do our activities match our principles?

principle: "Youth involvement in all stages of network development"

indicators: number of youth participants, number in leadership positions, retention rate of participants, youth perceptions of inclusion.

tools: Surveys, statistical tracking, documenting success stories.

Evaluation

evaluation strategies

Evaluation strategies are often divided into two general categories, process and outcome evaluations. Unfortunately these terms have a confusing number of meanings in planning and evaluation discussions. An alternative is using the terms implementation and impact evaluation.

implementation evaluation:

This type of evaluation describes the activities and their relation to mission and goals. It is used to monitor implementation of activities and systems and to identify changes for improvement. It asks the questions: Are we on track? Are we doing the best we can?

impact evaluation:

This type of evaluation determines whether the activities led to the desired changes. It asks the questions: Did the activities work? Were we effective? To conduct an impact evaluation you need to 1). Measure whether anticipated changes occurred, and 2). Prove that the program and not something else caused the changes.

evaluation techniques:

There are volumes written on types and techniques of evaluation. Read up about the differences and consult experienced evaluators before embarking on evaluation design. The key is to make sure that the resources and responsibilities of evaluation are understood. Evaluation process can be very expensive (time, materials, consultants et.) To save resources, if evaluation is to occur internally, the group should gather an evaluation team that has background in techniques of evaluation and contact other similar groups and obtain copies of their evaluations.

Groups may decide to bring in outside evaluators. Consultants can be hired or may be an in-kind donation from another organization. Outside consultants are a good idea if the group requires assistance in the design process and if neutrality and objectivity are a priority. It's important to make sure consultants approach the evaluation with an understanding of the distinct environment, dynamics and resources of the group.

evaluation resources

The Evaluation Exchange

<http://www.gseweb.harvard.edu/~hrfp/eval>

InnoNet is a free service that will design the framework for the evaluation with the participating agencies and will train staff to collect, analyze and report on the data
<http://www.innonet.org/>

Outcome based evaluation

<http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/>

Online Evaluation Resource Library

<http://oerl.sri.com/>

Aspen Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Online Evaluation Publications

<http://www.aspenroundtable.org/vol1/index.htm>

Community Initiatives Evaluation

http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/tools/EN/section_1007.htm

Community Building Resource Exchange

http://www.commbuild.org/html_pages/operational.htm

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- Green, B 1999
- Horsch, R. 1999
- Kegler et. al. 1998
- Mead, S.C. 1999
- Pawl, J., et al 1987
- Points Of Light, 1998
- Rymph, D.B. 1998
- Zinnerman, K. and Erbstien, N. 1999

Evaluation

evaluating networks

Evaluating networks requires going through the design process. Every evaluation needs to be clear about what outcomes and indicators they are looking at and how strongly they can link their relationship to the impact.

Network evaluation involves measuring three different types of indicators: impact indicators, implementation indicators and community indicators.

Implementation indicators include numbers and activities of the network. Impact indicators often refers to the institutionalization or the establishment of policies, practices and procedures that sustain the goals of the initiative

Often evaluating networks is looking at the decentralized impacts of informing, educating and empowerment. What is the impact of training 200 people in the asset model or of referring 200 volunteers to mentoring projects or facilitate collaborative meetings.

Impact is what the people you directly served do with that information, resources, and opportunities. Measurable ways in which individuals, groups, families and communities have changed behaviors and attitudes. It can be seen in changes on organizational level (agency by-laws) as well as change on individual level. (Parent using asset with daughter).

impact indicators

Changing agency attitude, missions, bylaws, and resource allocation in support of initiative goals.

“Hug scale” the desire to create partnerships

Memoranda of understanding to interagency linkage agreements

Increase in volunteer opportunities for youth,

Streamlined new intake procedures, new forms,

Youth/community representation in organizations

implementation indicators

Number of individuals and groups involved network activities: training, forums, meetings, referral service, and publication distribution.

Frequency of activities and levels of involvement

Quality of the services provided

Demographics and diversity participants.

Amounts and sources of funding

Direct and Indirect costs of services/personnel of the collaborative

outcome examples

Faith based organization including an asset building column in their foster parent newsletter

Middle school develops a student asset team to make changes to make the school more assets rich.

Mentoring program incorporated asset into their volunteer training.

Youth center changes by-laws to increase youth representation from 7 to 14 out of an 18-person board.

Local town creating a youth advisory council to the Town Board of Trustees and raising money to send two youth to the League of Cities conference.

Evaluation

community evaluation

Community collaborations have a vision of an overarching community impact. This requires a cumulative evaluation of all the efforts of the community around this common desired outcome. The network only enhances the community outcome; it is the programs and individuals that directly create these outcomes.

Collecting data on community impacts requires organizations and agencies to be intricacy involved in the evaluation process. They must agree to share their information and agree with the use of that information. The community needs to develop the standards of community activities and the methods of monitoring them.

“Not every partnership is a directly caused by links—but a lot of them are. Even if the coordinator is not a part of the agreement or planning. Partners that collaborate without the assistance of the coordinator are still benefiting from the system as a whole that rewards and supports collaboration. Links has created a culture of collaboration-by bringing people together and modeling collaboration. It is important to separating the staff of Links from the concept of LINKS as a system of community commitment.”

community indicators

Patterns of utilization across different groups of youth and families.

Services delivered by other agencies

Services offered by collaborating agencies

Services used by participants

Number of contacts youth and families have with multiple agencies

Time spent waiting for services (i.e. getting a mentor)

action list for community evaluation

- Train community within programs to design and conduct evaluation
- Develop facilitation and planning training so community members can lead the evaluation process.
- Coach program managers, board members, and staff on incorporating community leadership and evaluation into organizational structures and cultures.
- Facilitate networking with other organizations undertaking community evaluation efforts.
- Establish mentoring relationships to build the capacity of community members to organize the evaluation process.
- Remember to know who is involved and adopt effective methods and processes that engage and enable the community participants.

Evaluation

realistic evaluation

It is unrealistic to expect that all efforts—or even many—will have sufficient resources (funding, skills, and materials, information, time) to embrace a “bulletproof” evaluation system. However, it is not unrealistic to expect that every initiative adopt strategies to collect a minimal amount of information to make informed decisions for future changes and to communicate current successes.

Comprehensive evaluation looks daunting, however, like any new system it can be broken down into priorities and capacities. Evaluation systems take time to develop and change does not occur overnight.

In the beginning ask the questions: What is important right now? What can we evaluate right now? What do we need to start counting? Develop the initial evaluations by identifying intermediate and proximate outcomes that are positive, achievable and also understandable and /or seen as important by the community

recognize the messy lab

It is important to accept the fact that the world is a very messy laboratory. Many factors may influence any given outcome not just the actions of your group. Remember the more distance between activities and expected outcomes, the more other factors can contribute, either positively or negatively, to the outcome, making it difficult to pinpoint the cause of the effect. Additionally network activities are implemented simultaneously making it very difficult to separate the effectiveness of one set of activities from another. Designing evaluations to be rigorous enough to rule out all the alternative causative explanations requires considerable time, effort, expense, and commitment from all concerned.

Evaluation shouldn't be obsessed on defending all activities and outcomes of the group as being the “right” ones. It is an ongoing process of learning not a one-time endeavor of getting the right answer immediately. take the best of what you know and work to bring it about quickly to as possible in a sustainable way, and then they come back and improve the quality. It is a learning process about finding “better” ways to do things. To find the “right” way you would have to spending a lot of time researching, testing and analyzing. This may deprive the community from resources they need now. Take mentoring: We know it helps kids, but we don't know exactly how much or the “perfect” ways to set up a community mentoring system; however, does this mean should we stop mentoring children until it is all figure out?

stages of comprehensive design

first stage: Use process evaluation to examine implementation and how they can be improved in the future

second stage: Measure the short-term impact on participant's knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavior.

third stage: Measure long term outcomes through a time-series analysis of community indicators.

“Impact happens all the time. Instead of a ripple effect it is more like a boulder that has its own ripples but then causes splashes that cause their own ripples...It's the nature of the beast that makes evaluation difficult...”

SUSTAINABILITY

introduction

Sustaining community networks requires that the community has both the commitment and the ability to achieve their desired outcomes. Commitment refers to community ownership and support of the collaborative effort. Ability refers to having the resources (time, people, money and skills) needed to achieve goals. Sustaining networks also requires a responsive and proactive approach to changes in the community.

It is important to remember that commitment grows with time. A community effort needs to foster the ability of the early adopters to teach others the skills and rewards of community youth development. When 5 percent of the people in a group adopt a change, the change becomes imbedded in the group. When 20 percent adopt it the change becomes unstoppable.

sustainability factors	
community ownership	administrative support
A shared locally developed vision	A full-time paid coordinator and possibly additional paid staff support
Members know the purpose of their group and feel strongly about it	Coordinators who are skilled in community organization
Members have a goal to achieve and tasks to do to reach this objective	Coordinators earn the respect of members as an individual
Network has regular participation by at least half of the identified community sectors.	Coordinators are free from fundraising and not competing with partner organizations
Process and plans make sense to members at each step of the initiative	
institutionalization	
Network has membership expectations defining terms of office and replacement of members	
Network obtains letters of agreement signed by member organizations	
Organizations have multiple representatives in network	
Participation in network is incorporated into member organizations position descriptions	
Membership dues are a budget item of member organizations	

Sustainability

network challenges: change and growth

The following points illustrate some of the challenges to developing and sustaining community networks. The topics include; resistance to change, appropriate growth, leadership vacuums and equality of network members.

community resistance

Developing community networks requires change. Change for some people is a very scary process. Even though they may see the benefit of the change they may feel unsure or insecure about how the change will come about. The culture of community organizations has been very competitive and territorial in the past. They have spent years creating niches and constituencies to defend their importance to funders. Asking organizations to open up to integration and collaboration may face significant resistance.

Resistance can be from fear, frustration or anger. Using language or methods that offends others, are misrepresentative or offensive may lead to mistrust of members and the network itself. For example, in a community forum one member talking about bring more service-learning opportunities to the school stated— “teachers are from another planet, they have no idea how good a teaching tool getting students into the real world is” —this statement invoked much resistance from other members although many of them agreed that service learning is a good teaching methodology.

Resistance to changes occurs also when members view the change as unnecessary, requiring too many resources, or impossible to accomplish. It can be a reaction to poor communication and planning. If the group’s objectives not clear, plans of action will not fit together well and the overall picture of collaborative action will be lost. Selecting inappropriate activities where participants do not have the skills and resources to accomplish, or do not conform with participants’ values and norms also leads to resistance.

managed growth

Growth is typically seen as signal of success, but growth needs to be managed. Once the network and its activities take off in a community, there may be pressure to get everyone involved immediately. For example, if the community centers are a resounding success; every school may want to participate right away. A key to sustainability is to make sure that the initial activities and members are secure in the resources and support prior to expanding services and activities.

Typically, the strongest candidates to participate and implement activities are the first to be involved. Once the initial participants are self-managed and have developed their own unique supports system they can help expand the capacity to bring new people in by providing technical assistance, training, and good models and principles to new members. A philosophy of managed growth allows the group to include new participants without overstressing the capacity to support those already involved.

Sustainability

network challenges: leadership

Some networks never develop a system of shared leadership. This most often results in the coordinator being placed as the “de facto” leader of the group. Group leadership is very hard to develop when one person is viewed as the expert on the topic. Organizers need to avoid making themselves indispensable to the initiative by sharing as much responsibility and knowledge with network members.

One of the reasons for a leadership vacuum is that many community members are unfamiliar with being viewed and having the responsibility of community leadership. For example, members may not feel they have the financial and development skills to secure financial commitments for the group or they may not feel they can represent the cause appropriately. The coordinator needs to build the confidence and skills of members so they see themselves as effective community leaders and are able to gain legitimate respect in the community.

leadership transition

A network can not afford to lose its leadership and voices. The transitory nature of non-profit work, especially those tied with national service projects makes developing leadership transition a key part of sustainability. If a significant portion of the group’s history and background leaves the group it will cost the new members a significant amount of time assessing “why they do what they do”.

There is a cumulative impact on member retention. Loss of the history and continuity that long-time members bring often results in reduced or less visible outcomes and less community support on all levels: fundraising, media, legislative support, and access to resources both tangible and not. If the processes are not smooth, the inaction and wheel turning may frustrate the remaining members.

equality of member organizations

A network that is embedded within a specific agency faces significant challenges. The danger in placing responsibility for the network in a single institution occurs when self-protection and self-perpetuation of the organization become a more motivating force than community collaboration. No one agency can be allowed to “own” the process to the point that the other agencies just withdraw and leave it up to the “owner.” Members will gradually fade away, since they are all likely to have busy tasks to return to in their own agencies.

It is critical that the fiscal agent or host of the network needs to be viewed as equal partner. Organizers need to understand how much the sources and duration of funding will affect their decisions. Funding the network through membership dues, matching requirements from neighborhood groups and/or schools are some examples of how to disperse financial ownership in order to maintain balance in network ownership.

ways to transfer leadership:

Ask members to help select and coach replacements

Prepare at least a year in advance for transition of coordinator and key members

Use volunteering as a way to infuse others into the workings of the network

Diversify of leadership: Geographic, skills, and influences

Develop mechanism to help ease problems associated with turnover, such as orientation materials for new members and well-organized documentation of membership, member interest, group structure and decision making procedures

RECOMMENDATIONS

introduction

These recommendations are a synthesis of conversations with local organizers, America's Promise Fellows, national and local coordinators and partners, and personal reflections. They point to new opportunities for organizing around community youth development. It is hoped that they will provide dialogue points for consideration in the planning of the America's Promise the Alliance for Youth and other national, state and local initiatives.

The America's Promise Initiative is still in its development stages. Like many of the local initiatives studied in this project, America's Promise is learning as it goes. Collaboration, community mobilization, and asset building are concepts and practices that we are still learning about. Community building initiatives are the testing grounds for learning how to do what we want to do. How to create a better world for our children and our families. Honest reflection and assessment of the effectiveness, integrity, and impact of our progress is needed.

In interviews with individuals involved in the Promise Initiative many different perspectives arose. Support for the initiative waxes and wanes depending on the community or group interviewed. In some places the Promise Initiative is very popular at the local level, in others it is not viewed favorably and does not play a significant role in community decisions.

As it stands now, the success of the Promise Initiative depends on individuals in leadership positions for adoption. If the strong, top-down leadership is not there Promise Initiatives do not take a strong hold in communities. There is confusion about the promise as being "another buzz" and local communities wary of the initiative often ask: "Why should we support this? Aren't we already are doing these things?" They hold an underlying belief that participation does not lead to mutual benefit so they are resistant to join the campaign.

There are several reasons for these perceptions. Perhaps the biggest is that the Promise is new, still developing and moving in directions not necessarily anticipated. The Promise is working to adjust from a mobilizing idea to an organization with its own culture. In general these "growing pains" call for an assessment of the role of America's Promise and other national groups to see how they can help translate their systemic vision at the to sustainable action on the local level.

recommendations:

- Capitalize on strengths
- Support the Perspective: Community youth development
- Support the Preparation: Development of systems of support
- Support the People: Training, institutionalization, tools

Recommendations

capitalize on strengths

America's Promise is an ambitious social goal in the infancy of its development. The mobilization, education, and new initiatives that have been the result of this work are impressive. America's Promise would do well at assessing their strengths when planning in the future.

a. America's Promise message is on target.

When attempting to change social behavior especially through out a community, it is ultimately important to communicate the vision with brevity, clarity and in plain language. America's Promise provides a usable sound byte for years of research about what young people need to grow up healthy. It keeps the vision simple and focuses attention on how all people can support this vision.

b. America's Promise message is to everyone:

Americas Promise is just that--it is a promise to young people to take better care of its young people. This vision is the result of a thousand delegates from across the nation representing governments, civic groups, private industries, schools, youth and adults. These delegates recognized the role everyone has in the vision that all youth have all 5 resources, all the time, everywhere.

The name Americas Promise invokes community responsibility. The concept of "Communities and Schools of Promise" and "All 5 to All youth" connotes coordination and comprehensive services. America's Promise is a vision of creating villages. As a vision, it is up to the communities to decide how best to achieve it.

c. America's Promise is high profile:

Americas Promise has helped community youth development become a priority in many communities. The presence of General Colin Powell as leader and figurehead has given the initiative significant credibility. The endorsement and support of many national nonprofits, celebrities, corporations, state and city governments has made it known throughout the nation.

d. America's Promise leverages resources for youth

Americas Promise has leveraged new commitments to youth on national and state scales that are powerful resources. These commitments include 700 AmeriCorps Promise Fellows, State Governors declaring community youth development a state priority, national organizations partnering with corporations to provide resources such as money, products, services, and volunteers. Colleges and universities are forming Universities of Promise to with the hopes of using their resources to support the cause.

Recommendations

support the perspective: community youth development

In order to create nation-wide change focused on community youth development national groups need to make sure they are acting in ways that model collaboration and asset building.

a. improve the connection of community youth initiatives

Americas Promise and other community youth development initiatives challenge communities to collaborate. However, on the field level it appears that these groups do not necessarily work together. Often local coordinators will speak of picking one model over another. There is a need to counteract this message to communities that national efforts are competing engaging in “model wars”.

There is an overall level of “burn out” in communities where new initiatives start up and dissipate within a few years due to lack of influence or support. A community has a memory; if collaborative efforts are facing significant challenges and failures, especially due to competition for resources or other non-collaborative behaviors, the members of the community are less and less optimistic about the outcomes of another initiative.

Community initiatives would benefit by clarifying the unique role of each initiative and their commitment to support a common vision. Emphasize how the models are complementary and are different angles of the same common mission. They could to foster the relationships among the national organizations by creating a networking group of all of the program managers at the national level. Unless the national groups can “walk the talk” of collaboration; local groups will continue to struggle with sorting out all the different ways to sustain community youth development.

b. support the development of linkages

Like the asset model, America’s Promise is based on the concept that communities must look at the whole youth. It requires an array of approaches that meet the emotional, physical, mental, social, and spiritual health for each child. Providing one resource really well while loosing sight of the others is not an effective policy. National groups need to support local communities’ attempts to link the resources in innovative ways, though the development of community networks and comprehensive systems of support.

Communities should strive to build as many linkages among all 5 resources and all 40 assets. The linkages are already there and communities can do this work more effectively if they begin to build on them. For example, there is a strong tie between service and marketable skills, school to work initiatives can bridge the two through increasing nonprofit internships and job shadowing. Service-learning can add to students life skills such as planning, goal setting, cooperation, teamwork, and conflict resolution in addition to practical hands on knowledge of skills and multiple opportunities to discuss career opportunities.

Recommendations

support the preparation: developing systems of support

The sustainability of America's Promise Initiative requires deliberate attention to building relationships. It's going to take time to change perceptions, develop skills and to integrate services in order to change the way our social programs, community sectors and individuals approach the collective raising of our children.

a. improve the connection of national commitments and local communities

Americas Promise has been very successful in obtaining national commitments. The Promise bulletin often contains new commitments from national corporations, non-profits, communications industries, and government organizations. However, on the local level there is little connection between the national commitments and local efforts. A handful of local communities may recognize direct benefits but what about all the other local branches of that organization? How do local communities tap into the national commitment makers? If national commitment makers can be encouraged and supported to make sure that a wide array of local communities are benefit; local support would increase dramatically.

b. clarify the role of America's Promise Initiatives and local community efforts

What is the role of the Promise in individual communities? How do the ideals and goals translate to the local level and are these translations being recognized and valued? There are several areas where these questions are critical.

purpose:

Different initiatives have different outcomes depending on the community's desires. In some communities the Promise is used to begin a community dialogue and then dissolves community wide efforts once they feel this mission is complete. Others used the Promise to create new community programs. Some communities place all responsibility for Promise coordination in one organization, others create community networks. The National Promise partners need to understand and support the diversity of local efforts in order to fully understand the possibilities of the Promise and its leveraging power.

Recommendations

support the preparation: developing systems of support

b. clarify the role of America's Promise Initiatives and local community efforts (continued)

evaluation:

Community collaborations have a different system of evaluation than service delivery programs. They are one step or more removed from direct service. Their activities focus more on coordination and access to services, community mobilization and education, and systems development and planning. The current tracking system does not fit well with what many of the Promise organizers are engaged in. They are working with existing programs to support their work; many times they do not feel right in claiming those numbers.

There is a strong need to develop a mutual understanding of the tracking and outcomes of Promise Initiatives. Many organizers feel that the numbers of youth serve represent the outcome of community effort as a whole; not necessarily what America's Promise has leveraged. They feel it is more appropriate to evaluate the Promise in terms of connections, collaboration and community mobilization. There is an overarching need in the community sector to recognize the valuable impacts of community building activities and develop evaluation methods for these unique systems.

funding:

In hand with evaluation, national organization can support networks by educating funders the important role that these systems play. Community networks do not have to be expensive operations. They should develop local funding bases; however, seed money is often needed to begin the process. Three years of overhead funding may be enough to support the initial years of development.

recognition:

To foster local support, national groups should continue to recognize those communities that are actively creating the systems of collaboration. They can actively celebrate the diversity of approaches local communities by using their stories, long range visions and community report cards in training materials and promotional materials. They can provide support by placing trained national service volunteers in community building activities and as support staff to network coordinators.

Recommendations

support the people: The ultimate glue

Networks are the institutionalization of relationships. Individuals create relationships; they are the energy, the creativity, the life of collaboration and social programming. In order for collaborative relationships to have the stability required to have lasting impact there needs to be a focus on strengthening the people involved. National programs have an important role in fostering the people power required for this vision.

a. support the development of local coordinators

Most successful community initiatives have a full time coordinator supporting the efforts. An assessment of the role of these coordinators and what support they need is necessary to the success of the Promise Initiative. Promise Fellows interviewed indicated that they had little training in basic skill development. Examples of information requested include facilitating meetings and community forums, developing strategic plans, developing staff or volunteer structure, creating online communication systems (web pages, list serves) and developing localized activities appropriate for their groups. By supporting the training of Promise Fellows, the Corporation for National Service has the ability to promote the development of skilled local coordinators.

b. investigate the role of regional field officers

Most national organizations and programs focusing on community youth development employ program officers who are liaisons for local or regional groups. Unfortunately, these officers are not necessarily connected to the local communities in meaningful ways. For example, Americas Promise has four community program officers based in DC—They are assigned as many as 10 states widely dispersed across the nation. One officer may have Hawaii, Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, Alaska, Vermont, Mississippi and California on their list. This system does not support the technical assistance team in developing an understanding of specific communities, groups, opportunities and challenges so they can help facilitate problem solving, visioning and community building.

If program officers were located in specific regions it would go a long way to helping coordinate resources. Field officers could be the liaison between national and local initiatives and commitments and would have a close understanding of local communities and state governments. Field officers of different programs and initiatives could create their own coordinating group in order to create a united front for a specific region. Regional change will still be a complex and difficult task to achieve; however, its chances are improved by placing the support as closely to the ground as possible and creating connections among similar programs.

Recommendations

Conclusion

Americas Promise and other community youth initiatives are a new way of approaching our collective responsibility to provide our children with the most support and opportunities we can provide. It will take time to change the way we work together. We need to focus on the hope and resources we have and commit ourselves to working through the conflicts that might arise do to our habits, assumptions, culture, and policies. We need leaders to marshal resources on their behalf, to learn from effective, innovative models, to plan carefully, and to measure and report the results of these efforts to the public.

Strengthening these elements is the key to sustainability of the Promise initiative. Sustainability is having the collective commitment and the ability to carry out the necessary tasks to get what you want accomplished. Commitment is to a shared vision and process (what you want to accomplish) and the ability (resources including funding, time, and skills) to carry out what needs to be done (creating new relationships, strategic planning, new and or improved community services).

One of the benefits of the Promise model is the inherent flexibility it provides to communities. However, communities desire common understandings, coordination, shared resources and information, and a way of measuring the impacts of collaboration and other activities that support the initiative goals. It is hoped in the next phase of the initiative America's Promise will grow to meet the needs of communities and our youth.

Appendix

Community Networks Survey

Name of Network	Survey Participant
Address	Position in network
Phone	Fax
Email	Website

Is the Network affiliated with America's Promise?
If yes how?

What is the focus of the network (issue area)?

Geographic area
— Local — Statewide — Regional — National

Where do you feel the network is in its development?
— Start up — Implementation — Established

Is the network a part of another organization, an independent 501c3, or a voluntary association?

How old is the network?

Why did this network began? What is it trying to address?

Who benefits from this network?

Who participates in the network?

How do they participate?

¹ For the purpose of this survey, network is defined as an association of individuals representing different organizations and associations working together (collaborating) to achieve a common long term vision or goal. Other names that may indication a community network are partnerships, coalitions, initiatives, etc.

Appendix

Community Networks Survey (continued)

What does the network do? (please check all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clearinghouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Training | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lobbying | <input type="checkbox"/> Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Community forums |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special Events | <input type="checkbox"/> Publications | <input type="checkbox"/> Grant making |
| <input type="checkbox"/> List Serv | <input type="checkbox"/> Web site | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

How is the Network staffed?

Please indicate paid staff, AmeriCorps volunteers, citizen volunteers, interns

Who governs (leads) the network?

Annual Budget: \$0-25,000 \$25,000 –50,000 \$50,000-100,000 \$100,000+

What are the funding sources? (private donations, corporate, foundations, government)

In your opinion and experience, what are some of the best practices of the network ?

What are the biggest challenges?

What type (s) of technical assistance would make (have made) developing the network easier?

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please feel free to send any additional materials regarding this network via email, fax or mail. Your insights will assist in the development of a handbook for community networks. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to continue learning about these networks and will be conducting follow up interviews.

Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview?

Appendix

interviewquestions

network initiation

Please describe the who, what and when of network beginnings

planning and decision making

Who participated in the planning of the network?

How was/is it decided who participates in planning process?

Were/are there organizations choosing not to participate? Why?

What has been done to try to get non-participating organizations or individuals included in the planning process?

In general how would you describe the working relationship between and among these organizations?

What internal organizational issues, if any do these organizations face, e.g. capacity to participate in the process?

leadership

How is leadership developed in the network?

How is leadership transferred?

evaluation

How do you evaluate the networks performance?

Can you identify the two most important barriers that were overcome in the development of this network

Can you identify the two most important barriers that remain?

sustainability

What are the plans for sustaining the network?

What are the most important elements of sustainability for this network?

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