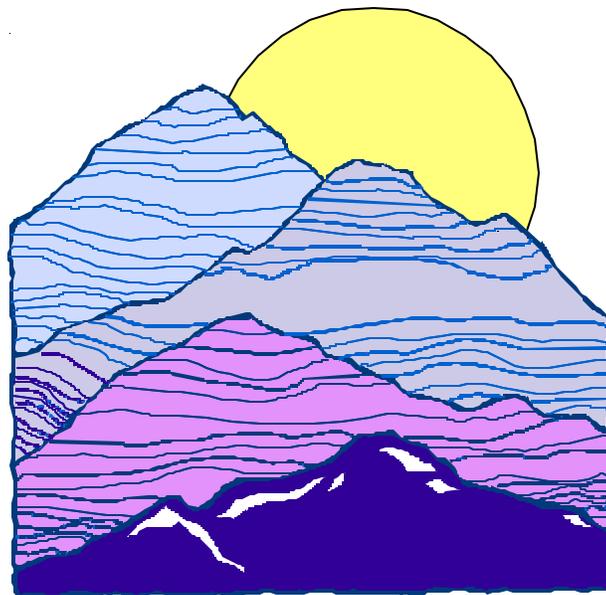


# **BASIC COMMUNITY PLANNING MODEL**

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South Carolina  
Department of Social Services

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## **OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE**

The most effective and comprehensive plans for addressing neighborhood and community problems are based on an organized community approach to providing multiple interventions directed to all members of the community that increase knowledge, develop skills, improve service delivery and create policy changes, and influence attitudes, decision-making and positive risk-reducing behaviors among members of the community.

## **PREPARE FOR THE COMMUNITY PROCESS**

**Assess the Community's Organizational Capacity:** The first step to take in developing a local neighborhood or community plan is to identify a start-up group. Why? A start-up group will give you a structure within which to begin planning your strategies and components. It will also give you the means to:

- Build support for your planning efforts among community members;
- Listen to the community's concerns and feedback;
- Conduct a needs and asset assessment in order to refine your initial idea to fit your community; and
- Secure resources for your planning efforts.

Reaching out to partners through a start-up group will help you build a more robust initiative, whether you focus on a specific neighborhood or your entire county.

**Identify natural allies:** The following questions can help you identify the individuals and organizations that are your natural allies:

- What kinds of activities do you think can make a difference in addressing the identified issues in your community?
- What group of people will you focus on?
- In what ways are they at risk?
- What is missing in their lives and communities that puts them at risk?

**Identify existing organizations working in your targeted neighborhood or community.**

Make sure you are aware of the activities in the community before you leap in. Avoid reinventing the wheel and stepping on the toes of other organizations. Learn from the successes and failures of other projects. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the history of service activities in the community? What strategies have been tried in the past? What has been learned?
- Who or what groups or agencies are currently concerned about the issue? Who participated in the past? Is there some person or agency already working on this issue in this community?
- What other networks, collaborative efforts, and coalitions already exist in the community? Which of these groups, if any, could take on the identified issue? Are there ways to collaborate or even combine forces?

## **INVOLVE COMMUNITY IN PROBLEM-SOLVING AND ACTION**

Programs must work from day one with parents and community leaders when designing and implementing prevention initiatives – their buy-in is essential to success and avoiding controversy. Involving new partners, like the business community, or traditional partners in new ways enhances any prevention strategy.

It is not sufficient for an outside person to come in, spend a few hours conducting the needs assessment or creating a logic model for a community, and then leave. Rather, community planning becomes the most meaningful and most effective if diverse workgroups are actively involved. These workgroups should include program planners, people knowledgeable about the target group, people knowledgeable about relevant research, youth from the target group, staff, and other stakeholders in the community.

Involving workgroups in community planning can:

- Bring people with different views together,
- Create a more common understanding and acceptance of the intervention/approach,
- Increase commitment to evaluation and understanding of the results,
- Increase cooperation among people in different agencies or community sectors, and
- More generally increase stakeholder involvement and support.

**Decide on the type of start-up group.** There are a number of different options for organizing your group. Consider what makes sense for your own community. Types of start-up groups include:

- Temporary group
- Subcommittee of an existing group
- Expansion in scope of an existing group
- Ongoing ad hoc group (public sector)
- Agency- or organization-based coalition
- Independent coalition

### **Steps in Creating a Start-up Group**

- Select members
- Match members' skills to tasks
- Choose a leader
- Invite members
- Plan for staff support
- Set initial meetings
- Establish ground rules

### **Key Attributes of a Start-Up Group**

- Shared concerns about the issues to be addressed
- Varied approaches to problem-solving
- Wide representation of community interests
- Strong commitment to prevention
- Ability to be influential
- Willingness to be constructive

## **ASSESS NEEDS USING SCIENCE-BASED DATA**

Developing an appropriate intervention program requires a critical first step – understanding the identified issue in your community. The process of learning about a health or social problem and identifying ways to intervene is called a “needs assessment.” A well-done needs assessment can offer more than the basis for creating a new initiative; it can provide a credible analysis of current public policy and increase public awareness of the identified issue.

Your needs assessment should help your community answer these questions:

- How common is the issue or problem in the community? Which people are most at risk?
- What programs and services are currently available to address the issue?
- What are the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the community about the issue?

### **Steps in conducting your needs assessment:**

- Determine the size and scope of your needs assessment. Decide how broad an area you will cover and how extensive your research should be.
- Identify key topics to study. Determine how much attention you will pay to the various areas that a needs assessment can focus on.
- Identify questions you want to answer. Develop specific questions for the areas you will study.
- Gather the information. Collect data and conduct research.
- Review the data and draw conclusions. See what the data tell you about the key questions.
- Report findings to the community. Share your key findings with key constituents and community residents.
- Use findings to develop an action plan. Decide what your findings tell you about the best way to proceed.

Data collection can be the most time-consuming part of the assessment process.

Important information can be found in a number of sources:

- Public documents;
- Other needs assessments;
- Reports of community survey data; and
- Health and community statistics.

## **INVENTORY COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

Documenting the range of existing services and prevention programs is important in many needs assessments. If you are planning a moderate or large-scale program, you do not want your program to duplicate the services and efforts of others. If you are interested in assessing the adequacy of programs and services, it will be critical to document the range of services and programs that exist and the nature of services and activities actually provided.

## **IDENTIFY COMMUNITY PROBLEMS**

After collecting the information for your needs assessment, analyze the information to determine answers to your key questions. What do the data tell us? What are the limitations of the data you are using? What does the community think is a problem? What factors contribute to these problems.

**Identify and select the goal(s) to be achieved:** When specifying a prevention or intervention goal, the target population should also be specified, e.g., who will receive the services being planned. This is important because what is specified in the activities below may vary with the population being targeted. The target population may be identified by its risk behaviors or by other characteristics such as age, sex, ethnicity, income level, or area of residence.

**Identify and select the specific behaviors that directly affect the goal:** After selecting a prevention or intervention goal, it is important to identify all the important behaviors that directly affect that goal, and to then select some (or all) of these behaviors to ultimately address. When identifying and selecting behaviors, it is often helpful to answer the following questions:

- What are the behaviors that directly cause or affect the goal?
- Which have the greatest causal impact upon the goal?
- Which are the most frequent or prevalent?
- What other factors should affect the decision about which behaviors to target?

**Identify and select specific determinants (risk and protective factors) for each selected behavior:** Given the specific behaviors to be changed, then the important determinants of each of these behaviors need to be identified. Determinants are the factors that affect whether or not people engage in specified behaviors. That is, the determinants of behavior have a causal impact upon behavior. They should include both risk factors and protective factors. When designing programs, it is often productive both to build upon and enhance strengths (protective factors) and to address the weaknesses (risk factors).

Two criteria should determine which determinants should be selected: (1) the magnitude of the causal impact of the determinant upon the specified behaviors; and (2) the potential magnitude of the causal impact that a feasible intervention can have upon the selected determinant. When selecting specific determinants, answering the following questions will be helpful:

- Which determinants are most strongly related to each behavior?
- What is the strength of the evidence for this?
- Which determinants can be most markedly changed by feasible interventions?
- What is the strength of the evidence for this?

*Use a structured problem analysis process to analyze the information you have available. This analysis, coupled with your needs assessment and resource inventory, will enable you to quickly determine the direct and indirect factors that contribute to*

*the problems that you have identified in your community. Knowing why a problem exists will enable your community to craft interventions that have the prospect of success in remediating the problems your have identified.*

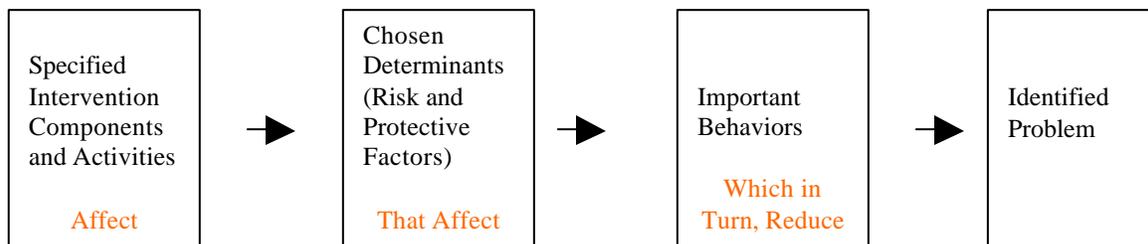
**Identify and select the particular intervention components or activities that have sufficient strength to improve each selected determinant:** Because few determinants are easy to change, typically multiple components or activities need to target each determinant. However, more important than the number of components or activities is the efficacy of each component or activity. That is, one very effective activity may be more important than several relative ineffective activities. In addition, programs or activities that are not targeted specifically to particular determinants are less likely to have as much impact upon those determinants.

Important questions to answer are:

- Which interventions (policies, programs, or program activities) can have the greatest impact upon each of the selected determinants?
- Are these interventions (policies, programs, or program activities) sufficiently powerful that they will actually markedly change each selected determinant?
- What is the evidence for this?
- Are the proposed policies, programs and activities feasible given the financial resources, staff and program capabilities, and other resources, and also given any challenges to implement the program?

The following model describes an appropriate planning model:

**Figure 1**  
**BDI Logic Model**



### **PUT YOUR PLAN INTO ACTION**

Probably the single most promising strategy involves implementing one or more interventions that have already been developed, evaluated with rigorous research, and demonstrated to have a desired behavioral impact on a population similar to the community's target population. For example, a community might implement, with fidelity, a specific sex education curricula that has been demonstrated to be effective with a similar population. Another somewhat similar and promising strategy involves implementing an intervention with the common qualities of programs that have been

demonstrated to be effective with similar populations. For example, communities might implement a curriculum that has the common qualities of a curriculum that has proven to be effective. When it is not possible to implement either of these strategies, then a third promising strategy involves designing new interventions using the process that many people have previously used to design new and effective programs. The BDI logic model can be an effective tool for managing each of these planned intervention processes.

In any case, your intervention should be based upon the latest research available about risk and protective factors, and designed to enhance the protective factors and reduce the risk factors associated with specific behaviors associated with the problems you have identified.

### **MONITOR AND EVALUATE YOUR PLAN**

There are at least three good reasons to build program monitoring and evaluation into the local planning process:

- It leads to good program management;
- It prevents resources from being wasted on things that don't work; and
- It helps build a strong scientific base for the field.

The evaluation design should consider the following hallmarks of good evaluations:

- Measure behavior, not just attitudes and beliefs – especially because attitudes and intentions about many issues are often unrelated to actual risk and protective behaviors.
- Conduct long-term follow-up (of at least one year). Short-term results do not necessarily translate into long-term results, and some effects are not apparent in the short-term.
- Conduct proper statistical analyses – which means, among other things, stating the hypothesis you are testing before collecting the data.
- Include a sufficiently large sample size.
- Share both positive and negative results. When negative evaluations are not shared, the meaning of positive results are compromised.
- Replicate studies of success programs.

### **SUMMARY**

- Multiple, mutually complementary strategies are more likely to make a difference. There are no easy answers to many of the problems facing our communities. Maintain a long-term, intense effort – of at least five years. Avoid one-shot programs. Communities must address the identified problem on multiple fronts simultaneously.
- Involving new partners, like the business community, or traditional partners in new ways enhances any prevention strategy.
- Preventing many of the problems facing our communities requires long-term, intense effort. One six-week program will not have much lasting effect, nor will a couple of

classroom hours. And, because a new crop of at risk people arrives on the scene every year, prevention efforts must be constantly reinvented.

- Communities can unite around the need to address the identified issue without expecting unanimity about ways to prevent it. Different organizations and members of the community can adopt different strategies to reach the same end. Sometimes strategies even seem to conflict with each other, but that is not necessarily a problem. Many of our problems are complicated — even messy, and “messy” strategies can often be useful.
- When dealing with the problems that are facing our youth, parents are important influences on their children’s decisions about behavior. They should be supported in their roles and included in planning and developing strategies to prevent the problems that exist for youth. And, needless to say, involving teens themselves — the “target audience” — is always essential.