

Strategies Guided by Best Practice for Community Mobilization

INTRODUCTION

Advocates for Youth is one of five national partners funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) under the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention: Integrating Services, Programs and Strategies through Community-Wide Initiatives program. The CDC envisions that sustainable teen pregnancy prevention initiatives will be anchored in a community when its leaders (“grass tops”), its citizens (“grass roots”), and its youth are fully engaged in mobilizing the community, educating stakeholders, implementing evidence-based interventions, and increasing access to youth-friendly, contraceptive and reproductive health care. Advocates for Youth coordinates and provides leadership and support on the Community Mobilization and Sustainability component of the Initiative.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION?

Community mobilization is essentially a process for reaching out to different sectors of a community and creating partnerships in order to focus on, and ultimately address, a pressing issue such as teen pregnancy. Community mobilization supports teen pregnancy prevention efforts by empowering community members and groups to take action to facilitate change. This includes mobilizing necessary resources, disseminating information, generating support, and fostering cooperation across public and private sectors in the community. Mobilization efforts are often described in the literature as “building community or collaborative partnerships,” “community engagement or involvement,” or “coalition building.” Though some of these terms refer to specific structures, the underlying goal of engaging a wide-range of community members to create and implement a shared vision is the same: “Community partners implement [a] community action plan by pooling and leveraging resources, including skills, funds, and other assets. This process, known as “mobilization,” should enhance the ability of the community as a whole to address teen pregnancy.”

STRATEGIES GUIDED BY BEST PRACTICES

Drawing from the research, this document summarizes 14 key strategies that are based on best practices in community mobilization, collaborative partnerships, and coalition-building. Part A grantees will find that many of these strategies overlap with best practices for engaging key stakeholders and best practices for working in diverse communities.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION:

The goal of this component is to successfully mobilize and support three community partner teams: the Core Partner Leadership Team comprised of “grass tops” decision makers and gatekeepers at the local, county and state level who ensure financial, policy and resource support; the Community Action Team comprised of “grassroots” local community influencers – highly respected community members who provide support for culture change, and the Youth Leadership Team comprised of community youth who build participation in programs, promote use of services, and offer support for culture change. By providing resources, training, and technical support, Advocates for Youth helps build the capacity of Part A grantees to establish these fully functioning and highly effective groups of “change agents” and develop strong leaders who are able to effectively manage all aspects of the initiative.

Note: Some Part A grantees may use other terms to refer to their participating “teams,” however the function and membership of the groups are generally the same across grantees.

1. SECURE STRONG LEADERSHIP ^{2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8}

- ✓ Engage strong leadership with community member support to drive the community-wide efforts. Strong leaders can include both individuals who take on the work and the organization(s) that spearhead collaborative efforts. Lead organizations should possess a number of key characteristics including: the will to serve as the leader of the community mobilization effort over a significant period of time; the capacity to provide both infrastructure

and human resources; financial stability; the ability to garner and manage financial resources, and the respect and support of the community.

- ✓ Ensure that individuals and organizations in leadership positions have adequate support and resources.

2. ESTABLISH A FORMAL STRUCTURE ^{3, 4, 6, 9}

- ✓ Develop a formal structure that can effectively lead community change efforts. This structure serves six essential functions: providing overall strategic direction, facilitating dialogue between partners, managing data collection and analysis, handling communication, coordinating community outreach, and mobilizing funding.
- ✓ Establish key structures and develop guiding documents to help facilitate the coordination of community-wide efforts. These may include specific committees (such as steering committees and subcommittees dedicated to a certain issue or strategy), organizational charts, codified rules of operation (such as bylaws), policy statements adopted by the partnership, and formal letters of agreement for those who lead, organize, and participate in the community-wide effort.

3. ENGAGE DIVERSE ORGANIZATIONS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, AND RESIDENTS

^{6,10,11,12,13,14}

- ✓ Engage stakeholders who are most likely to support evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention efforts. Engage young people, parents, educators, health care providers, and community-based organizations. Reach out to organizations and key players that are outside of the “usual suspects” (such as sexuality educators or family planning centers). This includes religious leaders, businesses, policy makers, media personalities, and others who have significant influence in the community.

4. ENSURE AUTHENTIC PARTICIPATION AND SHARED DECISION MAKING ^{8,11,15,16}

- ✓ Support a sense of commitment and ownership of the vision and plan for the community-wide effort by establishing clear roles and responsibilities for all group members, developing shared decision making processes, and ensuring that community members are in key decision-making roles.

5. ENSURE AUTHENTIC AND PRODUCTIVE ROLES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ^{17,18,19}

- ✓ Engage young people in all aspects of program planning, development, implementation, and evaluation. Provide training on how to effectively develop youth-adult partnerships. Create opportunities for both youth and adults to share decision making. Be sure to carve out specific roles for both groups based in part on their age and prior experiences.
- ✓ Remember to consider the practical challenges of involving young people such as scheduling meetings after school and on weekends, providing transportation, and offering meals as incentives for attendance.

6. DEVELOP A SHARED VISION ^{8, 9, 20, 21, 22, 23}

- ✓ Create a shared understanding of the goals of the community partnership by drafting a written mission statement specific to the collaboration. Though this statement may share aspects with the mission guiding the lead organization and/or its partners, making it distinct and different can help unify a vision. Once the mission statement has been agreed upon, be sure to make all partners aware of it so that everyone is working toward the same goal.

7. CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT ^{2,13, 22, 23, 24, 25}

- ✓ Build a solid understanding of the current state of teen pregnancy and sexual health in the community by conducting an environmental scan and community mapping process. Use a variety of techniques such as surveys, focus groups, and interviews with residents and key stakeholders. Compile data on adolescent sexual behavior rates, teen birth rates, health factors, school data, and information on out-of-school or youth at high risk as well as knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and behaviors. Assess what is already available to young people by gathering information on community-based, school system, youth development, and family planning / health center resources.
- ✓ The needs assessment research will inform the direction of the mobilization effort by serving as the basis for creating a strategic plan, program activities, internal communication plans, and public education campaigns. Be sure to clearly define the community that the partnership is designed to serve whether it is by geographic location or other population characteristics.

8. CREATE A STRATEGIC PLAN ^{22, 25, 26, 27, 28}

- ✓ Draft a strategic plan that lays out the partnership's goals (the explicit ways that community partners are going to address the problems identified in the needs assessment) and objectives (the activities that will be carried out in pursuit of the goal). The strategic plan should identify the social, structural, and individual changes that will lead to reductions in teen pregnancy and birth rates.
 - Social changes include increased public will; greater community leadership capacity; increased and high quality community participation, and supportive community norms.
 - Structural changes include changes made by institutions such as schools, health departments, and family planning centers and/or changes in policies and practices that support individual behavior change.
 - Individual changes include shifts in knowledge, skills, and behaviors among both youth and adults.
- ✓ Ensure that goals and objectives are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-framed).

9. IMPLEMENT MUTUALLY REINFORCING STRATEGIES ^{20, 23, 25, 26, 29}

- ✓ Decide on the activities that participants—whether individuals or organizations—will undertake to support the goals and objectives enumerated in the strategic plan. Identify a range of key strategies aimed toward youth—such as implementing evidence-based sexuality education programs in schools or improving access to youth friendly family planning services—as well as key strategies that support the overall mobilization effort. For example, develop strategies that will improve stakeholder participation, develop local leadership, and improve resource mobilization.
- ✓ Remember to reevaluate these activities as conditions in the community change or new funding becomes available.

10. CREATE A FUNDRAISING STRATEGY ^{12, 22, 23}

- ✓ Explore a wide range of funding opportunities to ensure that the strategies and activities can continue beyond the life of the original funding cycle. Consider diverse funding sources including foundation

grants, gifts from individual donors, and in-kind donations from organizations and business in the area. Focus on local resources whenever possible.

- ✓ Consider drafting standard fundraising language that can be used for a variety of “asks.” Make sure to include the best argument for why the community partnership is important as well as your mission, goals, objectives, strategies, and plans for evaluation. Don't forget to add specific information about the community from the needs assessment.

11. ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE CHANNELS FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATION ^{3, 9, 14, 21, 30}

- ✓ Ensure a constant flow of information by adopting formal communication strategies that allow for frequent, deliberate, and productive exchanges between partners.
- ✓ Consider appointing a skilled communicator to the role of “relationship manager” and putting this person in charge of continually informing members about what the partnership, the committees, the subcommittees, and even individual members are doing to advance the mission and strategic plan.

12. EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ^{13, 23, 31, 32}

- ✓ Educate and inspire the community by holding forums, engaging local media, designing public service announcements, creating billboard campaigns, drafting letters to the editor, launching web-based and social media campaigns, or holding home health parties, parent meetings, roundtables, and conferences. The goal of public education campaigns is to generate awareness, motivate action, encourage funding, and keep the community focused on the issue at hand.
- ✓ Remember to tailor the messages to the community, incorporate data from the needs assessment, and choose spokespersons who resonate with the intended audience.

13. CONDUCT PROCESS AND OUTCOME EVALUATIONS ^{23, 25, 33}

- ✓ Decide in advance how the partnerships are going to define success and remember that there is often a long delay between when a partnership begins its activities and when there is a measurable impact on youth in the community (such as a reduction in teen birth rates). Set key benchmarks and progress points along the way.

- ✓ Design both process and outcome evaluations and decide on the intervals at which each will be conducted. Process evaluations will help determine, for example, how many community members have participated in each activity and whether the activity was carried out as originally planned. Outcome evaluations will assess whether the partnership resulted in expected changes in the community.

14. EVALUATE THE COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION EFFORT SEPARATELY 4, 5, 23, 29, 34

- ✓ Conduct an evaluation to help determine the impact of the mobilization effort – that is, whether the partnership was successful in building leadership, shifting norms in the community, harnessing community buy-in, and mobilizing financial resources. Evaluate the partnership by looking at the quality of the strategic plan, level of member participation, total number of actions implemented, satisfaction of members and staff, collaboration of members and member agencies, members' knowledge of the problem at hand, perceived ownership and empowerment of members, partner mobilization and maintenance, and team functioning.

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MISSION

Established in 1980 as the Center for Population Options, Advocates for Youth champions efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. Advocates believes it can best serve the field by boldly advocating for a more positive and realistic approach to adolescent sexual health.

OUR VISION: THE 3RS

Advocates for Youth envisions a society that views sexuality as normal and healthy and treats young people as a valuable resource.

The core values of Rights. Respect. Responsibility.® (3Rs) animate this vision:

RIGHTS Youth have the right to accurate and complete sexual health information, confidential reproductive and sexual health services, and a secure stake in the future.

RESPECT Youth deserve respect. Valuing young people means involving them in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies that affect their health and well-being.

RESPONSIBILITY Society has the responsibility to provide young people with the tools they need to safeguard their sexual health, and young people have the responsibility to protect themselves from too-early childbearing and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

SOME RELATED PUBLICATIONS FROM ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

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A Guide for State Teen Pregnancy Prevention Organizations

Hot Potatoes: Keeping Cool in the Midst of Controversy

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