

Strategies for Increasing Community Readiness

(Excerpted from Plested et al., 1998)¹

Once community readiness has been assessed, it is time to develop strategies for moving the community from their current level to the next higher one. The interventions suggested below are by no means comprehensive but have been utilized effectively by some communities. For communities in the first four stages (tolerance through preplanning) strategies are generally aimed at raising awareness that a problem exists. For instance, activities at the stage of community tolerance should be restricted to one-on-one and/or small group activities. Home visits to discuss the issues and win people over, small activity groups, talking circles, and one-on-one phone calls have been used effectively by some communities who assessed themselves at this stage.

At the denial stage, the focus is on creating awareness that there is a problem in this community. Statistics may be less important than descriptive incidents. At this stage personalized case reports and critical incidents are likely to be of more impact than general statistics or data. Media reports, presentations to community groups, and similar educational interventions can focus on the general problem in similar communities, but also must include local examples to create awareness that there is also a local problem.

At the vague awareness stage, communities can utilize small group events, pot lucks or potlatches, and newspaper editorials or articles. Although use of national or regional data may make little impression on community residents, local survey data may be of value, including results of school surveys, phone surveys, or focus groups. It should be noted that at this stage of readiness, some elements of the community such as school officials and parents may be resistant to initiating these types of activities. However, they should be encouraged to do so for the growth of the community.

At the preplanning stage, communities can begin to gather information related to effective prevention programming, examine existing curricula and educational materials that are culturally relevant, make efforts to invest key community members in the planning process, conduct local focus groups or small public forums to discuss the issues, and increase media exposure.

For communities in the stages of preparation and initiation, efforts are generally aimed at gathering and providing community specific information to the general public. Addressing substance use for example, at the preparation stage a valid and reliable school drug and alcohol survey might be initiated so that accurate local data are available. Community telephone surveys could be conducted to gain information about community attitudes and beliefs about drug and alcohol use, in-depth local statistics should be gathered, more diverse focus groups should be held to gain a wider representation of the community and develop practical prevention strategies and proposals for grants could be begun.

Communities at the initiation stage might conduct training for professionals and paraprofessionals, conduct consumer interviews to gain information about improving services, identify service gaps, and utilize computer searches to identify potential funding sources that match community needs.

For communities in the final three stages, institutionalization, confirmation and expansion, and professionalization, strategies are more programmatic in nature. Activities at the institutionalization stage consist of initiating basic evaluation techniques in an effort to modify and improve services, provide in-service training to increase the number and quality of trained community professionals, plan community events, offer community volunteer recognition, and conduct community workshops.

At the confirmation and expansion stage, the same types of activities can be utilized, but at a higher level of sophistication. This might include external evaluation services to provide a more comprehensive community data base, activities that change local community policy or norms, media outreach that provides information about local programs and reports local data trends, and community focus groups or public forums to maintain grassroots involvement. For the rare community which has achieved the final stage, professionalism, interventions could consist of a very high level of data collection and analyses, sophisticated media tracking of trends, local business sponsorship of community events, and diversifying funding resources.

¹ Plested, B.A., et al (1998). Community Readiness: A tool for effective community-based prevention. The Prevention Researcher, Volume 5(2): 5-7.