

SPF Step 2: Capacity

Capacity, the second step of the SPF, involves building and mobilizing local resources and readiness to address identified prevention needs. A community needs both *human resources* (e.g., staff and volunteers, knowledge, and skills) and *structural resources* (e.g., funding, technology, policies) to establish and maintain a prevention system that can respond effectively to local problems. *Readiness* describes the motivation and willingness of a community to commit local resources to address identified prevention needs. Prevention programs, policies, and strategies are always more likely to take off—and take hold—if they're well supported.

The following are three strategies for building local capacity for prevention:

1. Engage diverse community stakeholders
2. Develop and strengthen a prevention team
3. Raise community awareness of the issue

Engaging Diverse Stakeholders

Engaging a broad range of stakeholders is key to unlocking a community's capacity for prevention. Prevention practitioners need diverse partners—from residents to service providers to community leaders—to share information and resources, raise awareness of critical substance use problems, build support for prevention, and ensure that prevention activities reach multiple populations with multiple strategies in multiple settings.

The following are some of the different community sectors you may want to involve in your prevention initiative:

- Substance abuse prevention
- Law enforcement
- Health care providers
- Local government
- Local businesses
- University and research institutions
- Neighborhood and cultural associations
- Youth-serving agencies and institutions

Potential community partners will have varying levels of interest and/or availability to address your prevention efforts. Some may be willing to help out with specific tasks, while others may be willing to take on leadership roles. The following are some different participation options (i.e., levels of involvement) for prevention stakeholders in your community:

- *No involvement:* Stakeholders engage in separate activities, strategies, and policies (e.g., “You do your thing, we’ll do ours.”)
- *Networking:* Stakeholders share what they are doing during interagency meetings; talk about community issues in which they all have a stake; or communicate about existing programs, activities, or services (e.g., “Let’s talk and share information.”)
- *Cooperation:* Stakeholders publicize one another’s programs in agency newsletters, write letters in support of one another’s grant applications, co-sponsor trainings or professional development activities, and/or exchange resources such as technology expertise or meeting space (e.g., “I’ll support your program, and you’ll support mine.”)
- *Coordination:* Stakeholders serve together on event planning committees and community boards or implement programs and services together (e.g., “Let’s partner on an event.”)

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- *Collaboration:* Stakeholders create formal agreements (e.g., memoranda of understanding, contracts), develop common data collection systems, partner on joint fundraising efforts, pool fiscal or human resources, and create common workforce training systems (e.g., “Let’s work together on a comprehensive plan to address the issue. After all, our missions overlap.”)

The following are some different ways to approach people and organizations in the community with information about, and invitations to participate in, your prevention efforts:

- Call your contacts, particularly those with overlapping interests
- Attend and speak up at community meetings and events
- Ask your partners to contact their partners
- Keep potential partners well informed about prevention activities and progress
- Meet with key players, including public opinion leaders and local decision makers
- Anticipate and overcome roadblocks (e.g., address the concerns of those who might oppose or hinder prevention efforts)

The following are some different ways to encourage stakeholders to get more involved in prevention (i.e., move from networking to cooperation, coordination, or collaboration):

- Meet face-to-face to discuss overlapping goals and agendas
- Extend an invitation to attend a prevention team or task force meeting
- Make more specific requests for involvement once prevention planning is underway
- Extend invitations to attend future prevention events and activities
- If nothing else happens, maintain the relationship by keeping stakeholders informed of prevention activities and progress

Strengthening Your Team

Full collaboration, the highest level of involvement, often takes the form of a prevention task force. While not all stakeholders need to be involved at this level, the task force should include representatives from those community sectors that are most vital to the success of your prevention initiative. Here are some considerations for building and/or strengthening your task force:

- *Identify and fill gaps:* Once you have a team in place, ask yourself: Are all key community sectors represented? If you identify any gaps, try to fill them—but first make sure that your existing partners support additional recruitment. If current partners have reservations (e.g., “More people mean more opinions and conflict!”), take some time to point out, as specifically as possible, why you want to bring each new partner onboard.
- *Build prevention knowledge:* A truly representative task force means that members will bring diverse insights and experiences to the table, as well as varied knowledge and perspectives on the priority problem being addressed. Use a variety of strategies, including guest speakers and group trainings, to increase task force members’ understanding of the problem and effective prevention strategies.
- *Monitor and improve group structure and processes, as needed:* Even the most well-informed group won’t be productive unless it functions well. To help your team work together effectively, discuss how you will share leadership, make decisions, divide tasks, resolve conflicts, and communicate with one another—as well as with the broader community.

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Raising Community Awareness

By raising public awareness of your community's priority substance use problem, you can help garner valuable resources and increase local readiness for prevention. The following are some strategies for raising community awareness:

- Meet one-on-one with public opinion leaders
- Ask task force members to share information in their own sectors
- Submit articles to local newspapers, church bulletins, club newsletters, etc.
- Share information on relevant websites and social media outlets
- Host community events to share information about and discuss the problem
- Convene focus groups to get input on prevention plans

It's always helpful to think "outside the box" when looking for new ways to raise community awareness. For example, the local high school may have a media club that can help you create a video about your community's priority problem and/or prevention efforts. Which individuals and groups in your community could help you reach out, spread the word, and get others involved?

Capacity and Cultural Competence

Below are some examples of capacity-building activities that will help to ensure that your prevention efforts will be culturally competent:

- Recruit prevention partners from diverse community sectors
- Connect with high-risk and hard-to-reach populations, and recruit representatives from these groups to join your task force
- Help your task force learn about your focus population
- Help your task force learn about diversity and cultural competence, overall

Capacity and Sustainability

Many capacity-building activities support the long-term sustainability of prevention efforts, for example:

- Engaging partners and tapping resources from diverse community sectors
- Building widespread community awareness of and support for prevention
- Cultivating champions among influential leaders and decision makers
- Building task force capacity to support evidence-based prevention

By building and mobilizing local capacity for prevention, you create the foundation your community will need to begin developing prevention efforts that will be effective and enduring.