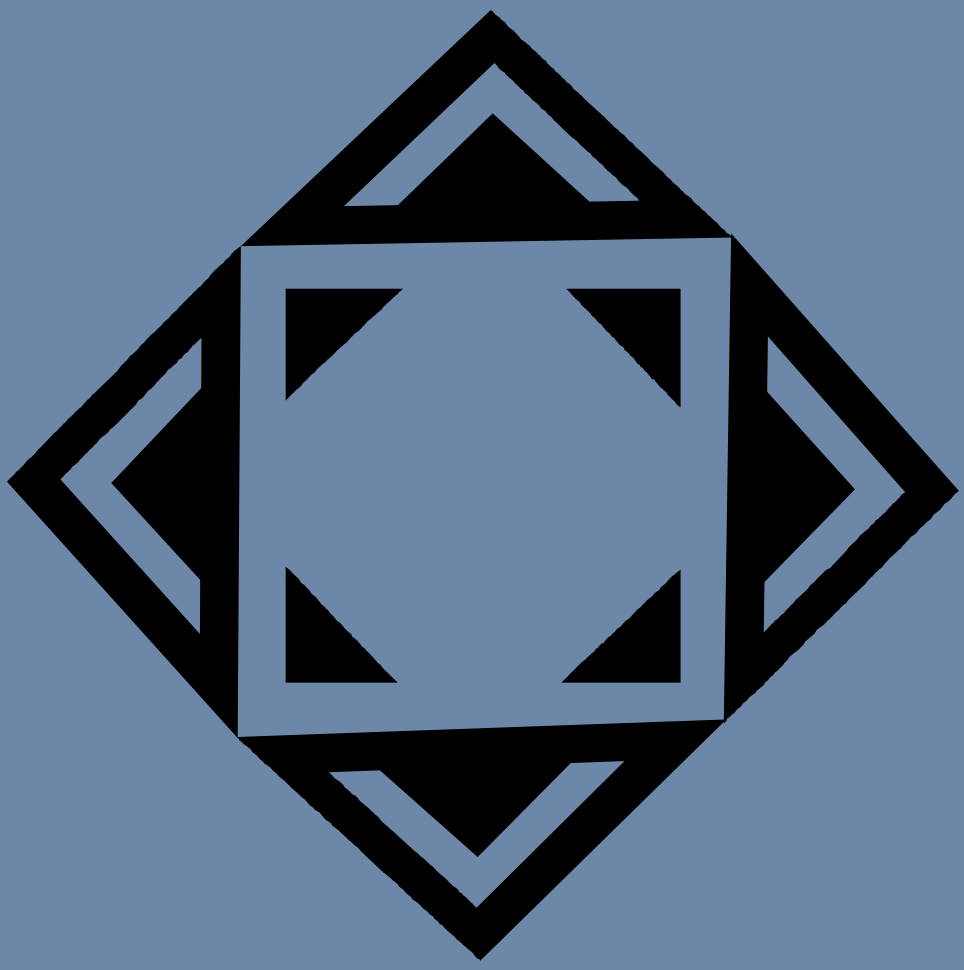
Engaging Communities in Sexual Violence Prevention



A Guidebook for Individuals and Organizations Engaging in Collaborative Prevention Work

by Morgan J Curtis, LMSW

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The following guidebook is meant to serve as a tool for communities and individuals who are beginning the process of planning for community-based primary prevention of sexual violence. There are many meaningful ways to engage community members in this process, not all of which will be covered in this guidebook, so please feel encouraged to seek out other strategies.

Special thanks to Annette Burrhus-Clay, Karen Rugaard Amacker, Rose Luna, and Tim Love of TAASA, Linda Hunter of the Interpersonal Violence Prevention Collaborative, Peggy Helton at the Office of the Attorney General, and Helen Eisert of LifeWorks for their input and editing.

An Introduction to the Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence

At the core, primary prevention is about ending sexual violence.

"Primary prevention" is a term from the public health field. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines primary prevention of sexual violence as "population-based and/or environmental and system-level strategies, policies, and actions that prevent sexual violence from initially occurring. Such prevention efforts work to modify and/or entirely eliminate the events, conditions, situations, or exposure to influences (risk factors) that result in the initiation of sexual violence and associated injuries, disabilities, and deaths."[1]

If I had to describe primary prevention of sexual violence in one sentence, I would say, "Primary prevention is stopping sexual violence before it occurs by engaging in strategic, long-term, comprehensive initiatives that address the risk and protective factors related to perpetration, victimization, and bystander behaviors". Primary prevention focuses not only on individuals, but also on the community and societal factors that increase the risk for sexual assault and uses initiatives that focus on the good of the whole rather than on individuals. To that end, primary prevention of sexual violence, as conceptualized by the CDC, utilizes the ecological model for identifying and addressing risk and protective factors.

The Ecological Model[2]

The ecological model is designed to take into account various theories of behavior and, in this case, the multitude of factors that contribute to sexual violence. The ecological model used by the CDC for sexual violence prevention combines biological, psychological, cultural and feminist models of the causes of sexual violence. It includes four levels; individual, relationship, cultural, and societal. The visual representation of the model shows how the various levels interact with one another. The levels are interdependent, so changes in one level can contribute to or reinforce changes in another level. Moreover, in order to make sustainable changes, an initiative would have to focus on more than one level of the model. For example, if we only focus on changing an individual's beliefs about sexual violence, but they are still receiving messages that support sexual violence from their peers, community, and society, is the change likely to stick?

"No mass disorder afflicting humankind has been eliminated or brought under control by attempts at treating the affected individual."
~George Albee

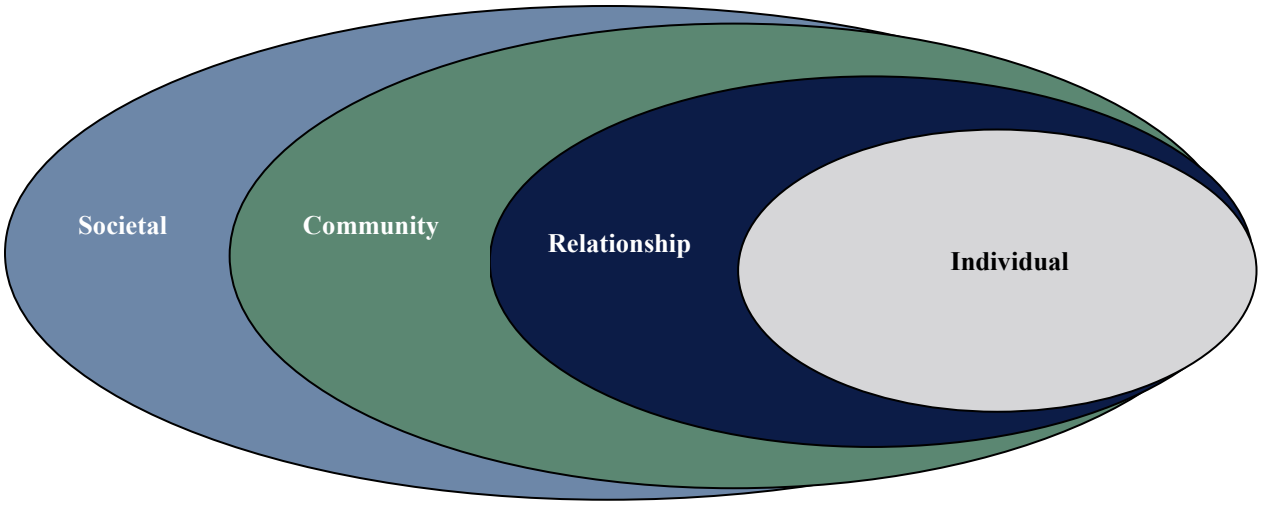
Risk factors are factors that add to the risk for being a perpetrator or victim of sexual violence. *Protective factors* are factors that decrease the likelihood of becoming a victim or perpetrator of sexual violence. It is important to note that these behaviors and factors are related to sexual violence (because they are likely to co-occur) but that no *one* factor is necessarily a direct cause of the violence. Research on protective factors is very limited at this point, so the examples given below focus on risk factors for perpetration of sexual violence.

"…there is no cause, only the accumulation of risk factors. No single factor does much to tell the story."
~Jim Garbarino

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2004). Sexual violence prevention: beginning the dialogue. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. p.1.

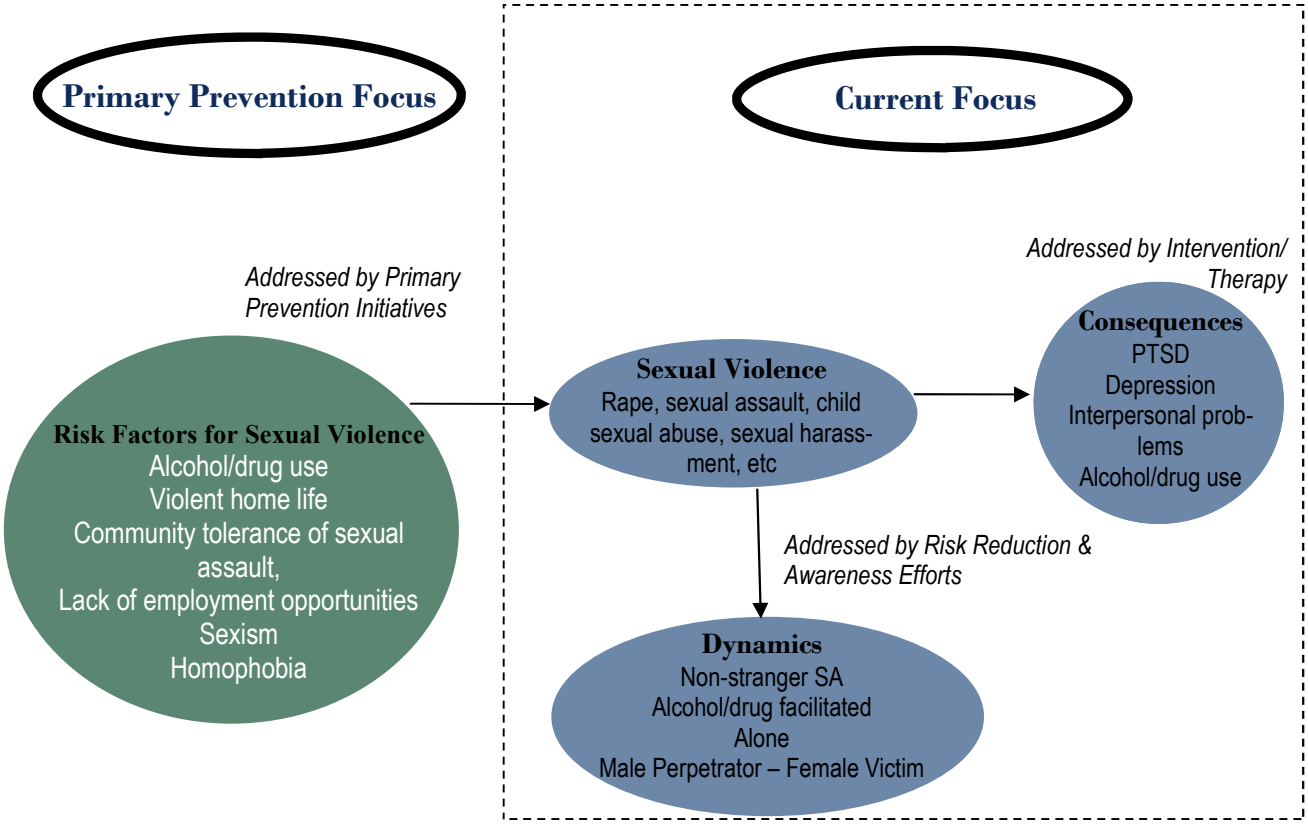
[2] Ibid

LEVEL	RISK FACTORS
Individual Level These are personal factors or characteristics that are related to sexually violent behavior, including biological factors and personal history.	Drug/Alcohol Use Hostility Toward Women Acceptance of Sexual Violence
Relationship/Interpersonal Level Individuals and their behaviors are influenced by their interactions with family, peers, and other important people in their lives.	Sexually Aggressive Peers Physically Violent Family Life Emotionally Unsupportive Family
Community Level Community level factors also greatly influence a person's beliefs and behaviors and can set a standard for how people are supposed to behave. These influences include one's workplace, school, various government entities, and neighborhood.	General Tolerance of Sexual Assault Lack of Enforcement of Policies Lack of Employment Opportunities
Societal Level Societal, in this sense, refers to the broader workings of a culture, including norms about gender roles, religious beliefs, and the balance of power between certain groups.	Inequalities/Oppression Norms about Masculinity & Violence Norms about Entitlement to Sex



A Holistic Approach to Sexual Violence

In the sexual violence field, we have a tendency to treat sexual violence as though it occurs in a vacuum. We deal with the consequences of sexual violence through crisis intervention and counseling and with the dynamics of sexual violence through risk reduction and awareness efforts. However, we rarely take (or have) the time to step back, remove sexual violence from the box, and examine the factors that happen before sexual violence occurs that make that violence more likely to occur. The following diagram shows sexual violence as the symptom of another set of problems/issues. The box with the dotted lines depicts the way we have typically dealt with sexual assault. Primary Prevention means bringing in the piece that is still outside the box so that we can prevent sexual assault from occurring in the first place. Holistically addressing the issue of sexual assault would involve addressing all of the components (dynamics, consequences, and risk factors) through the appropriate strategies (risk reduction/awareness, and primary prevention).



Primary Prevention vs. Risk Reduction

Risk reduction programs focus on helping *individuals* gain skills to reduce their risk for being victims of sexual violence and changing behaviors that might put them at risk. These programs focus on the dynamics of sexual assault (e.g., the methods of slipping someone a drug to facilitate a sexual assault) so that individuals can use that knowledge to try to keep themselves safe.

Examples of these programs:

- Self-defense
- Watch your drink campaigns
- WHO CARES
- Yellow Dyno
- Good Touch/Bad Touch
- Internet Safety Classes
- Rape whistles
- Recognizing perpetrators

Primary prevention helps the community take ownership of the problem of sexual violence and seeks to create a safe, healthier community by change the conditions lead to sexual violence

Why isn't this primary prevention?

Although risk reduction programs have some benefit for helping increase an *individual's* safety in certain situations, these programs are not primary prevention. First of all, they are not focused on addressing the root causes or the risk factors of sexual violence; they are focused on the dynamics of sexual violence. They make the potential victim responsible for their own safety without making the community responsible for changing the factors that lead to sexual violence and without helping potential perpetrators change. For example, if a person has been exposed to a program focused on risk reduction for drug facilitated sexual assaults, they might know to watch their drink, not accept open drinks or drinks from strangers, and keep an eye on their friends. These tactics may help reduce the likelihood that someone at the party can slip a drug into their drink and sexually assault them; however, a person who is looking to commit a drug facilitated sexual assault that night would be likely to target someone else. The probability of ***any*** sexual assault being committed has not necessarily changed. Risk reduction is focused on the individual and on benefiting one individual, whereas primary prevention is population-based (i.e., it focuses on "benefits for the largest group possible"[3]). In theory, using the above example, successful primary prevention would result in fewer individuals seeking to commit a drug-facilitated sexual assault.

Some Key Components of Primary Prevention

Strategic

Primary prevention must be deliberate. Successful initiatives will address sexual violence based on how sexual violence is manifested in a given community and will use data, provider knowledge, community knowledge, and theory to guide the design and implementation of strategies. This means moving beyond just doing education or awareness programs wherever someone will let us in the door and being more strategic in both target audience and content of our initiatives. Moreover, it means moving beyond the traditional prevention education programs and into strategies that are aimed at social and cultural change and skill building to address given risk factors and root causes for sexual violence.

Population-Based

Primary prevention initiatives should focus on the good of the whole rather than on the good of an individual. This means that strategies are designed to maximize impact for the largest portion of the population, rather than attempting to make changes individual by individual.

[3] CDC (2004). p. 2.

Comprehensive & Long-Term

Risk factors for sexual violence occur at the individual, relationship, community, and societal level. Each level is impacted by the other three levels; effective primary prevention initiatives address risk factors at multiple levels in order to reinforce changes at each other level. That is, efforts need to focus on changing behaviors and dynamics in relationships, while also changing the community and societal factors that influence those behaviors and relationship dynamics. Primary prevention initiatives focus both on behavior and on *context* (on the factors that influence that behavior). Prevention of sexual violence cannot happen overnight… It also can't happen in a one hour presentation to a student or community group. Changing attitudes, behaviors, and norms requires repeated exposure to information and practice at skill building, in addition to support from various other levels. It is important to understand that our strategies must aim at inducing and supporting change in the long run and not just hope to change minds in one hour. Utilizing the ecological model to address multiple levels of influence means that the message will be reinforced. Engaging other community members and organizations in this work has a similar impact.

Focusing on Root Causes and Contributing Factors

Generally, work that is related to sexual violence addresses either the consequences (PTSD, depression, etc) or the dynamics of sexual violence (e.g., women as victims, use of alcohol or drugs) without actually addressing the outside factors that make sexual assault more likely to occur in the first place. This view puts sexual assault in a vacuum, whereas primary prevention efforts attempt to step back and put sexual violence in context; primary prevention sees sexual violence as a symptom of other problems, not just a problem in itself. It's important to point out that root causes and contributing factors are different from situational factors or dynamics of sexual violence. A *situational factor* is something that might be associated with a specific sexual assault and probably includes specific behaviors of the victim or perpetrator and the circumstances surrounding the incident. For example, if a woman has been drinking with a man she knows and he sexually assaults her, the fact that they are alone is a situational factor that increased the likelihood of the assault occurring, as is the fact that she has been drinking and is therefore more vulnerable. However, people being alone and women drinking are not root causes of sexual violence. Contributing factors include conditions that generally make sexual assault more likely to occur but are not theorized to be direct causes of sexual assault, such as abusive family environments, objectification of women, various oppressions (e.g., sexism, homophobia) and social norms about men, violence, and masculinity.

"It is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural, and physical environment conspire against such change."

~ From the Institute of Medicine report *Promoting Health: Intervention Strategies from Social and Behavioral Research*

Based in Community Mobilization

Sexual violence is everyone's issue; everyone is impacted by it in some way. Community mobilization focuses on giving ownership of the issue and its solutions to the community. Sexual violence prevention then becomes the responsibility of the entire community and not just of advocates and other staff of rape crisis centers. Mobilizing communities to respond to sexual violence and its risk factors ensures that initiatives are appropriate for a community and is also more likely to instill lasting change at all levels. Community members are seen as resources in this process and as having their own skills and knowledge to contribute to ending sexual violence.

The Importance of Engaging Communities in Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence

Shifting the onus of responsibility for ending sexual assault from crisis center staff to the community at-large is a key component to primary prevention in the public health model. Why might that be? The most effective approach to solving problems in a community is by engaging the community to design a solution. Engaging the community in this work has multiple benefits:

Buy-in: When community members feel engaged in a process, know their voices are heard, and that their ideas are being incorporated into the planning of strategies, they will have greater buy-in to the process and will be more invested in the success of the strategies.

Sustainability: True community-based initiatives build leaders to do the work at-hand. This, combined with buy-in, makes the initiative more sustainable. Individuals are given skills to continue the work and feel invested and encouraged to do so.

Resource sharing: Community members bring vast knowledge, expertise, and resources to the table. These are not all formal resources (e.g., money, organizational leadership), since community members bring their knowledge of how the community works, in addition to other skills and resources. Such resources are critical in designing prevention efforts that will be appropriate for (and therefore more successful in) a given community. In the long run, engaging community members will save time and effort, even though it may seem time consuming in the beginning.

Necessity: It will take the entire community to address the complexity of the issue of sexual violence and its causes. Many of the factors that contribute to this issue are ingrained in the fabric of the community's culture; therefore it will take a united effort to make an overall impact on sexual violence.

Share the Load

Community-based initiatives are not initiatives that involve the community carrying out your pre-determined set of objectives for sexual violence prevention. Community partners must have decision making capabilities within the coalition and must be given responsibilities. Ideally, you will all be equal members who share leadership and vision. This also means sharing the work that the group engages in. Remember, we are encouraging community ownership of the issue of sexual violence prevention; we must let our communities engage in this work in ways that are meaningful and effective for them. What this also means is that you and your agency must actively support your community partners and the work that they are doing. Since we are acknowledging that many issues are related to sexual violence and that a holistic approach is needed to end sexual violence and create healthy communities, it is only appropriate that you would give back to the community partners that are at the table. This means taking the time to attend meetings with them, attending and/or supporting their events, and even, in some cases, incorporating some of their messages into the work you are already doing.

Identifying Potential Community Partners

Defining Community
There are many different ways to conceptualize "community". Community can describe a group of people who live in a specific geographic location (e.g., a county, city, or even a zip code or neighborhood within a city). Additionally, a community can be a group of people with a shared characteristic such as ethnicity or age. It is important to start any community –based process by defining what you mean by community.

There are a variety of ways to identify potential community partners. One important point to keep in mind is that for primary prevention initiatives, the partners will probably need to be more diverse than those who serve on the local SART or similar community collaborations. It is ideal to strive for a group that is representative of the community that will be the focus of the primary prevention initiatives. "Representative" can mean a variety of things, and in actuality, a group cannot be completely representative of a population without involving every member of the population. However, there are steps that can be taken to ensure that a variety of voices are heard and that a diverse group is at the table. For example, you will want to consider issues of race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, education level, geography (where they live in the service area), in addition to areas of expertise or influence. Think beyond typical organizational leaders to find other individuals in the community who might be beneficial to your efforts. When you are trying to identify potential community partners, in addition to considering the issue of diversity and representation, think of the following questions:

- Who has a stake in violence prevention?
- Who is doing prevention work in other fields (e.g. substance abuse, teen pregnancy)?
- Who has access to populations or resources that you'd like to access?
- Where are prevention efforts the most needed?
- Who *wants* to be involved?
- Who is doing work related to any of the root causes of sexual violence?
- Who is already supportive of your efforts and might be a good ally?

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is tied up with mine, then let us work together."
~ Lilla Watson

Another good tool to help guide the identification of potential partners is community asset mapping. (This is a multi-use tool and therefore has its own section. Please see page 28.)

Recruiting Community Partners

Once you have identified potential community partners, how exactly do you get them to the table? There's no universal answer to this, since different strategies or motivations are going to appeal to different people. Below are some tools that might be useful for creating interest and engaging people in this work.

Relying on Personal Connection
People are often more likely to do something for someone they know and like than they are for someone they've never met. This is a basic principle of our human nature. Therefore, it's often helpful to use existing connections to make new connections, rather than making cold calls. One way to facilitate this is to do an informal assessment of your staff, volunteers, and board members. Find out what they are involved in outside of work, what organizations they belong to, etc. Most people are involved in some group setting outside of work, whether it's a church group, athletic activity, civic organization or other group. As mentioned above, many of the partners you

bring to the table are likely to be different partners than you've engaged previously. For example, you might want to engage the local little league or a local men's organization. You might even want to involve neighborhood groups. If you can identify a connection between these groups and someone already connected to your organization, perhaps they would be willing to make the initial call for you to explain the project and gauge interest. If nothing else, they are likely to know a good contact within a given organization. This strategy might also help identify some agencies or individuals you might not have previously considered that would be good partners to bring to the table.

Additionally, keep in mind why you are approaching a specific individual. Did someone else in the community mention them as a leader? Or as having a specific skill or level of experience that would be an asset to the workgroup and to sexual violence prevention. Make sure the person knows why you are approaching him or her specifically.

Framing the Issue

Sexual violence impacts everyone; however, it does not impact everyone in the same way. Not everyone will respond to the same approach of explaining why they should be involved in prevention of sexual violence. For some, appealing to their common humanity is enough; for others, it will require making personal connections, hearing stories from survivors, or even appealing to the bottom line (i.e., the actual monetary costs of sexual violence). It is important to attend to the issue of framing when recruiting partners to participate in your workgroup. For example, we know that a lot of people do not react well to the term "sexual assault", either because it's an uncomfortable topic or because all they hear is "sex". We also know that there are still a lot of misconceptions about sexual assault and prevention of sexual assault. For example, in our society most sexual assault "prevention" programs are really risk reduction efforts like self-defense or watch your drink campaigns. However, comprehensive *primary* prevention of sexual violence involves dealing with the root causes and risk factors related to sexual violence, and therefore deals with a broader scope and impacts many other aspects of the community. Part of what you are doing is trying to create safer, healthier community for everyone – that is a natural by-product of efforts that attempt to address issues such as family dynamics, relationships, poverty, racism, and/or alcohol and drug use (to name a few). RCCs in the country are engaging in these efforts with the specific goal of ending sexual violence, but certainly there are many other benefits. Framing your prevention initiatives in this way can be especially helpful. No one is likely to come right out and tell you that they are pro-sexual assault, but it is easy for many people to dismiss that as "not my issue." It is much easier to make the case that building a healthy, safe community is everyone's job.

We have to acknowledge a few things in relation to this point. First, one of the community problems that arguably plays into sexual violence is the silence and shame placed on the issue. Some individuals feel that framing the issue of sexual violence as a healthy community initiative only plays into and supports that silence. Others feel that they need to meet the community where it's at so that they can work to challenge that silence without losing people from the beginning. Find an approach and a balance that works for you and your community.

Use Mission/Vision Statements

One way to help with the issue of framing is to create a working mission statement for your group (with the understanding that it probably will change when you have the group up and running). The process of coming up with the mission statement will help **you** to clarify what it is you are seeking to do with this workgroup. Moreover, it's a good basis for how you will talk about the focus and direction of the group when you are approaching potential community partners. For example, some groups at the 2007 TAASA Annual Conference came up with the following:

1. An initiative for community-wide action to enhance the safety and health of (the men, women, and children of) _____ (insert part of Texas).
2. To engage in a united effort to strengthen community involvement. To insure a strong, healthy, safe environ-

ment by the elimination of sexual violence.

3. To create and implement a community-wide plan to prevent sexual violence and to increase the health and safety of our community.
4. Engaging the community in contributing to the vision of a healthier, safer environment for all; through active participation we endeavor to end all issues of sexual violence.
5. To strengthen and promote community involvement using collaborations to lay a foundation for preventing and ending sexual violence, now and in the future.

Think also beyond the mission statement to elaborate a few talking points on what it means to you. For example:

Mission statement: To engage in a united effort to strengthen community involvement; to insure a strong, healthy, safe environment by the elimination of sexual violence.

- Sexual violence is a community issue, and ending sexual violence requires a unified, community-driven effort.
- Sexual violence is a symptom of many other issues, and addressing these issues will result in a safer, healthier community overall, in addition to reducing the rate of sexual violence.

Even if you never actually read your mission statement to anyone, it's a good process for thinking about the various ways you can frame this issue to appeal to a broad range of potential partners. It is also a good starting point for when your community group comes together and needs to form a mission statement to guide its work.

"The quality of the relationships you develop, and the commitment of participants to the work you want to do, are directly connected to the time and effort you expend in creating those relationships."[4]

Open Invitations

Even with some of the best connections and a lot of knowledge about your community, you may not be able to identify all of the individuals who would be appropriate for or interested in your workgroup. Thus, it is possible to also do an open invitation to a first meeting or information session, just to gauge the general interest of the community. Engage in a dialogue with the attendees about community safety, sexual violence, primary prevention, who they consider to be community leaders, and the community in general (strengths and challenges). With this method, you may get a roomful of people or only a few people, regardless, they are people who you might not have encountered otherwise. Take their feedback seriously and invite them to join the workgroup or continue giving input in other ways. (See page 15 for a sample announcement/invitation.)

Looking Beyond Workgroup Involvement

Of course, not everyone you approach will be able to serve on a community workgroup, but don't dismiss people as key allies just because they can't or don't want to make that particular commitment. Perhaps they are willing to help in other ways, like donating money, offering space for meetings, making connections to other potential partners, or certain kinds of technical assistance. If they have experience in work that involves assessment, evaluation, or some other needed area, perhaps they would be willing to train your workgroup or review documents/plans and offer feedback. Keep in mind that everyone has a part to play and that this is a key time to begin building those relationships.

[4] Stringer, G. (2003). Sexual violence prevention in rural communities. Olympia, WA: Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs.

Engage Volunteers

Engaging in comprehensive primary prevention initiatives and the preceding planning process is a time consuming endeavor, and this time commitment is one of the main concerns expressed by crisis center staff members who are doing this work. However, it's important not to discount the resources at-hand that might help with prevention efforts. Volunteers have long been a key resource for serving victims of sexual assault and helping out at crisis centers in other ways. Volunteers can be a similarly critical component for primary prevention efforts. There are often few non-direct service volunteer opportunities with crisis centers, yet there may be current volunteers who would like to work on community-based prevention efforts. There are probably also other individuals in your community who would like to get involved with your organization but are intimidated by the thought of working the hotline. This is an excellent opportunity to expand opportunities for current or future volunteers. Working with volunteers is a chance to help build community leaders in prevention work, brings in people with diverse skill sets, and also might allow your center to broaden its reach. Think about opening this up to existing volunteers and also including the option in your efforts to recruit new volunteers.

Consider allowing volunteers (or even student interns) to take the lead or be involved in the following:

- Meeting planning and facilitation
- Community assessments
- Meeting with potential community partners
- Researching prevention efforts in other parts of the state or the country
- Staying up to date on current prevention-related literature
- Attending meetings of related coalitions or workgroups

Author's note: When I first started doing this work, I served as a peer advocate on my college campus. Unlike many of the other peer advocates, I never felt very comfortable with direct crisis intervention work, even when I had the training and the skills to do it. However, I was very passionate about the few opportunities I had for community-based work and prevention work as a volunteer. It gave me an opportunity to utilize more of my strengths and was also more rewarding for me. There are almost certainly people just like that in every community in Texas.

"Find ways to build leadership capacity with training and hands-on experiences. And build a leadership team so no one person can take over or burn out."[5]

[5] Stringer (2003)

The sample flyer below is from the Montrose Counseling Center in Houston, Texas. It was an open invitation to join a focus group relating to sexual violence in the GLBT Community.

MONTROSE COUNSELING CENTER

GLBT SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION FOCUS GROUP

What would a world without sexual violence look like?

There would be less substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, bias/hate crimes, suicide, sexual orientation/gender stigmas, sexism, child abuse, victims-turned-predators, school dropouts, teen homelessness, health issues, depression, post-traumatic stress, mental health issues, mood swings, sleep and eating disorders, social anxiety, unproductivity in schools and the workplace, prostitution, fear, homophobia, stress on public health, justice and welfare systems, heterosexism, child/teen pregnancy, poverty, unemployment, incarceration, etc.

We need your input on ways to reduce or stop sexual violence.

When: Wednesdays, 6 - 7:15 p.m.
Beginning March 14, 2007 and meeting for four weeks

Where: Montrose Counseling Center
701 Richmond Avenue
Houston, Texas

Structure and Running of Community Workgroups

Now that I Have People at the Table….

After all of the trouble it might have taken to actually get people involved in helping end sexual violence, you might be wondering to yourself, "now what?" Many centers across the state have expressed anxiety about what direction to take the workgroup and have worried that they can't bring the group together unless they are absolute experts on what all of this prevention stuff means. Really, this will be an opportunity for crisis centers and their community partners to learn together.

DON'T SHORTCHANGE THE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING -

We all know that there are a lot of challenges related to engaging communities in sexual violence prevention. It will take a constant, concerted effort (at least in the beginning) to maintain interest and dedication. The initial stages of the workgroup process are critical to the eventual success of a community group, and relationship building is a key part of the initial stages. Taking time to get to know one another, establish connections, talk about your partners' fears and hopes for this process, etc, will help establish buy-in to the process and will show your commitment to a holistic view of leadership and community-building. Moreover, it will give you an opportunity to show your commitment to your community partners. Community partners need to understand, from the beginning, that the process will be one of give and take; that it won't just be about them taking on our work. Relationship building starts the minute you approach a potential community partner.

There are many different models of working with community groups and coalitions, and usually the concentration of power and participation of the members varies with each model. Most of us have been involved in coalitions where one lead agency calls together a group for the purposes of convincing them of a predetermined course of action and enlisting their help. For the purposes of comprehensive, community-based primary prevention, we are looking to move beyond that model to one that truly engages community members and partners at every step of the process, beginning with the process of determining the best course of action. In other words, your efforts need to be truly community-driven, and your main functions are to facilitate the process, educate and add input as a member of the group, and to implement some of the strategies that are determined by the group to be priorities for prevention of sexual violence in your community.

Number of Workgroup Members

In theory, for efforts to be community-based, it would be ideal to have the entire community involved in every step of the process. Now, some of you are thinking, "how do I get 200,000 people at one table?" Figuratively and literally, this would provide a challenge. The key, again, is trying to engage a diverse, broad representation of your community. Of course, in the beginning, you may only be able to get 5-10 people who are willing to show up and begin the process. That's okay, too. You have to start somewhere, and since it is a process, there will be time during the planning and assessment to continue engaging more people. As long as you make deliberate attempts at bringing together a diverse, representative group of partners who are committed to the process and to engaging the community, the actual number of people involved is less important.

Visioning

As a starting place, consider doing the following activity with your group in order to get them in the mindset of what primary prevention is and what it has to do with the entire community. It can be very helpful to guide groups through various visioning exercises to gain understanding of primary prevention and buy-in to the process and mission.
One way this can be done is to start by dividing the group into smaller groups (3-5 people) and asking them to spend about 15 minutes talking about what they think contributes to or causes sexual violence.

Note: When doing this exercise, remember to talk with the group about the difference between root causes/contributing factors and situational factors related to sexual violence. (see page 9). Otherwise, participants may give a lot of answers that focus on certain individual's behaviors and less on what actually causes or contributes to the violent act.

After they've had some time to discuss this, bring the group back together and discuss the various answers that were given. Let each group report back, and write their answers on a flipchart or a dry erase under a heading that is only the letter A. Draw connections between similar answers, and discuss how, then, if we want to end sexual violence, we need to address these contributing factors.

Next, give the groups the same amount of time to talk about what a community without sexual violence might look like. You can even give them some prompts:

- How would relationships be different?
- Day to day life?
- Advertising?
- Conversations?
- Work?

Again, bring them together to talk about some of their ideas of how their community would be different. When you've got a big list, point out that the first exercise is condition A and this exercise is condition C,. Now, ask them to brainstorm possible routes to get from A to C in their small groups. When this is complete, explain that condition B is all of the strategies that will get from point A to point C (i.e., condition B is primary prevention).

This activity not only helps people grasp the basic concept of primary prevention of sexual violence but also helps begin the dialogue about causes, strategies, and goals. It is an initial opportunity to hear people's thoughts and learn about each other's beliefs. Moreover, by beginning to look at the world you want to build, you can bring a focus to the positive, healthy aspects that you want to promote, rather than only thinking of the problems you are trying to address.

Following this exercise might be a good time to consider setting a mission statement for your workgroup that will guide your future work together.

"Community development sets a framework that involves community participation at every level, which fosters local leadership and sustains prevention strategies for the long term."[6]

Education

Since you are bringing this group together with some specific predetermined goals and a basic paradigm from which to approach the work, it will be important to make sure that everyone is on the same page regarding information about sexual violence and about primary prevention concepts. It is important that the group begin their work with this common understanding, and it's a good chance to dispel myths and answer questions. We know that certain rape myths and misconceptions about sexual violence are still prevalent in our society, and it's not unlikely that some of the new partners you are working with will hold some of those beliefs. Make sure you leave time for having these discussions and helping to educate rather than assuming that everyone involved will automatically have a working and accurate knowledge of the issues. It is not necessary for everyone to come to an agreement on all aspects of sexual assault, but it is important to make

[6] Dopke, C.O. (2002). Creating partnerships with faith communities to end sexual violence. Olympia, WA: Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

sure the entire group is given the same information and is educated about the nature, consequences, and dynamics of sexual assault.

> *Author's note: During a state-level prevention meeting where we had convened a diverse group of partners to talk about sexual violence prevention, a member of the committee stopped me in the middle of my presentation to ask for clarification on the difference between domestic violence and sexual assault. I had taken so much for granted that I hadn't even bothered to define the issue that we were talking about preventing. Luckily, he felt comfortable enough to ask, but not everyone is going to feel comfortable enough to ask for clarification unless you create that space. Conversely, some of your partners might have a knowledge or experience base related to sexual violence, public health, or issues related to sexual violence, and it is important to allow them time and space to offer their knowledge as well.*

Keeping Efforts Community Based

As mentioned before, these efforts are designed to engage the base of the community in efforts to prevent sexual violence in a way that it is appropriate for and meaningful to them. It is important to keep this in mind as you plan for and facilitate the community-based workgroup. Tom Wolff's workbook *From the Ground Up!*[7] offers some thought provoking questions to help us determine the best ways to make sure we are involving the community. Some key points to consider are included below:

Leadership Development

People in power use a variety of excuses to justify not involving citizens/general community members in collaborative efforts. One of the excuses used most frequently is that community members do not have the knowledge or skill set necessary to fully participate in such efforts. Thus, if there is any community involvement, it is usually a) one token community member on a committee or b) seeking input from community members and then the coalition decides how to use that information. True community-based efforts move beyond token involvement to truly engage citizens in the process. A key part of doing this is leadership development, a process by which leadership skills and opportunities are deliberately passed to community members so that they can take active roles at the forefront of efforts to end sexual violence and increase community safety and health. Developing a broad base of leaders in these efforts also creates a more sustainable movement overall because the success and continuation of the work is not dependent on one person or small group of people. Leadership development increases the scope and success of community-based initiatives and is vital to the work of creating healthy communities.

Rinku Sen, former director of the Center for Third World Organizing discusses one of the benefits of grassroots leaders,

> "Grassroots leaders emerge directly from the cultural, political, and economic conditions that shape local communities, and they embrace family and friendship networks that keep them closely linked… Grassroots leaders tend to live in the communities they represent and work with, providing long-term, stable, and direct access to other residents…they provide a conduit between the voices of their community peers and institutional leaders."[8]

It is important that our efforts seek to engage such leaders and also help develop new grassroots leaders. As a part of this effort, consider allowing community workgroup members chances to facilitate meetings, meet with other

[7] Kaye, G. & Wolff, T. (Eds). (2002). *From the ground up! A workbook on coalition building and community development.* Amherst: AHEC/ Community Partners, Inc.

[8] Sen, Rinku. (2001). Grassroots leadership development: An essential strategy for changing communities. In *Grassroots Leadership Development : A guide for grassroots leaders, support organizations, and funders.* USA: W.K. Kellogg. Foundation, p. 17.

community members and leaders on behalf of the group, and carry out any other activities that help them develop skill sets. Connect members of the workgroup who have different skill sets and experiences so that they can mentor each other and everyone can gain additional leadership skills.

Membership

Issues of membership cover inclusiveness as well as diversity of membership. How exclusive will membership on the community workgroup be? Will it be open or by invitation only? It is important to consider how the so-called average person will feel like they have access to involvement in the group and how their voices will be heard. It is possible to be inclusive in various ways, not all of which result in having too many people at a given meeting. For example, if you have leaders from various neighborhoods or sectors of the community, they can be responsible for bringing the opinions, needs, and ideas of their community to the workgroup. If you are in an area where most people have access to technology, including computers and internet access, you might consider a "virtual council" where other community members and leaders offer their input via listservs and discussion forums and are also kept up-to-date on workgroup happenings in that way. Additionally, you might allow others to listen in on meetings (and/or participate) via a conference call setup.

If your workgroup is mostly representative of the overall community you are serving, then your efforts are more likely to be in line with what will be best for the community. Consider the diversity of your workgroup and how that diversity mirrors the community's diversity.

Communication

The issue of communication is very important in running a workgroup. Consider the impact of who controls the information and its dissemination (how, when, and to whom it is communicated). It is important to critically examine modes of communication to ensure that communication is not occurring in a way that sets some coalition members apart as more important than others, unless the group as a whole has collectively decided that this should be done. For example, if important information comes to your attention between meetings, how will you communicate it to members of the group and when? If certain individuals are given that new information immediately and others aren't given the information until the next meeting, what does that say about the relative importance of coalition members? Likewise, if certain people are given the information in person or via telephone and others through e-mail, what does that say? Unfortunately, in these instances, the members who are seen as important enough to get the information immediately are often those who are formal leaders in organizations or individuals who have formal power (e.g., funders). Consider breaking down that level of hierarchy in your group by communicating with all members in the same way and at relatively the same time. Ideally, you will bring this issue to the group, and let the group as a whole decide how communication should be handled.

"True community development will require of us that we share the field with others. It will challenge us to accept the expertise and leadership of our community partners." [9]

Decision Making

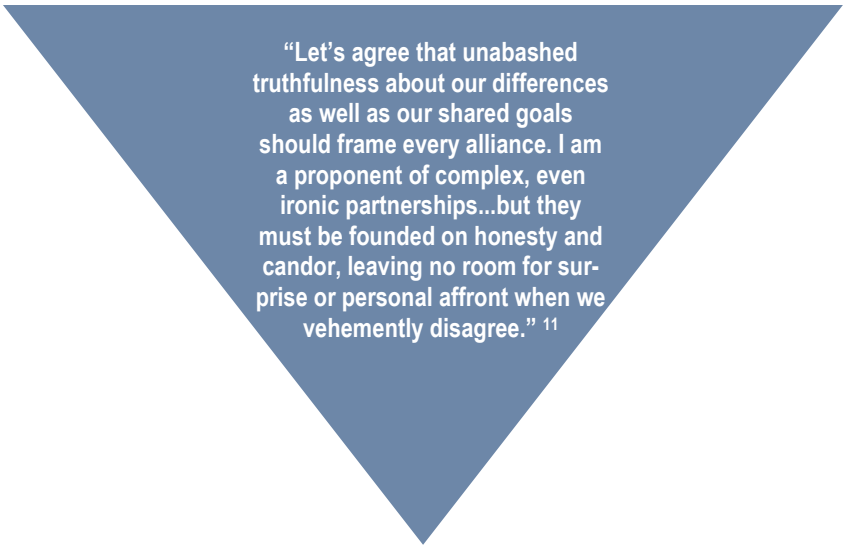
Like communication, shared decision making is another key component of community-based workgroups. In such a group it is not the job of one facilitator to gather information from the workgroup and then make the final decision. Members need to have a genuine involvement in decisions about the direction of primary prevention efforts because these efforts will impact the community. Decision-making can be handled in a few different ways:

- **Consensus-based decision making**: Rob Sandelin defines consensus as "a group process where the input of everyone is carefully considered and an outcome is crafted that best meets the needs of the

[9] Stringer, G. (1999). Community development & sexual violence prevention: Creating partnerships for social change. Olympia, WA: Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

group. It is a process of synthesizing the wisdom of all the participants into the best decision possible at the time… The heart of consensus is a cooperative intent, where the members are willing to work together to find the solution that meets the needs of the group."[10] He also notes that when a decision is made by consensus, this does not mean that everyone has been convinced that this idea is the *best* idea, rather everyone in the group agrees that the decision meets a specific need and consent to carry forth with that specific strategy.

- **Democratic decision-making**: Simply put: one person, one vote. Majority wins. Everyone gets an equal vote on all decisions and the option with the most votes wins. There are a few variations you can consider: instead of a simple majority (anything over 50%), a 2/3 majority shows a stronger support for a decision and can be used as the criteria. Run-off votes, another variation on this is useful when more than two options are up for a vote for a given decision. For example, let's say your group is trying to decide which of three PSAs they want to use, and each members gets to vote once. At the end of the vote, PSA #1 has 42% of the votes, PSA #2 has 38%, and PSA #3 has 20%. In this scenario, PSA #1 has the most votes, but there is not a clear majority. So, you can have a run-off vote between PSA #1 and PSA #2, where everyone gets to vote a second time between the top two. This way, if there were a large number of people who voted for #3 who would have voted for #2 as their second choice, their voice is still heard.



[10] http://www.ic.org/nica/Process/Consensusbasics.htm

[11] Tapp. A. (July/August 2006). Reclaiming our social justice organizations. Grassroots fundraising journal, 4-6. pdf available www.grassrootsfundraising.org/magazine/feature25_4.pdf

Identifying Community Specific Needs & Risk Factors

Planning for effective, relevant primary prevention strategies, requires identifying community specific risk factors on which the strategies will be based. Sexual violence manifests itself differently in different communities, so local data and perspectives are critical to the process of designing appropriate prevention strategies. Essentially, this process involves trying to "paint a picture" of the problem of sexual violence in your community. Who are the perpetrators? Who are the victims? Where and when are assaults occurring? What other circumstances/dynamics are involved (alcohol, multiple perpetrators)? What do community members think creates an environment where this occurs?

"Ultimately, a partnership is not designed to persuade the others to change to be more like you, but rather a respectful co-existence of different communities, cultures, and values." [12]

In addition to gathering information specifically about sexual assault, it will be helpful to seek information about some of the risk factors that have been identified in theory or research. For example, looking at availability of alcohol or drugs and attitudes about alcohol and drug use. Or assessing community members' attitudes about gender equality or looking at other measures of gender equality (e.g., pay inequity, sexual harassment). What are general community attitudes about sexual assault?

If there are researchers in your community (e.g., at a local university or college), consider asking for their input on this process. Some of the methods for finding this information include[13]:

- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Key Informant Interviews
- Existing Data

These are just a few ideas of ways to gather information. In all cases, it would be helpful to consult with someone in your community who has research or assessment experience and who might be willing to offer some advice on the process. The following section is meant to provide an overview of methodologies and is not an intensive or comprehensive guide for using each strategy.

Surveys

Paper or electronic surveys can be a useful way to gather similar information from large amounts of people without investing a lot of time. Online companies such as www.zoomerang.com and www.surveymonkey.com can be used for electronic surveys. (Note: These companies have a fee for their services and will also compile and analyze your data). Questions on the survey can be multiple choice, fill in the blank, short answer, etc. One downside to surveys is that they do not allow follow-up questions with individuals and can therefore result in data that is incomplete or difficult to analyze (if short answers are allowed). Additionally, depending on the methodology used, surveys can be expensive. Moreover, response rates can be relatively low, and the people who respond might not be representative of the community as a whole, thereby giving you incomplete data.

[12] Dopke (2002)
[13] REACT Community Organizing www.epi.umn.edu/react/main/community_org/community_org.html

Focus Groups

Focus groups are generally used to bring together representatives of specific groups (e.g., youth, Latin@, college students) in the community to get their opinions on a topic or feedback on an idea. This is a great opportunity to get in-depth feedback from members of different segments of your community in an interactive manner. It is ideal to record these sessions or to have someone other than the facilitator available to take very detailed notes. Always ask the group's permission before recording or videotaping. This is not a time to educate or change minds; it is a time to listen and gather information. Focus groups are best handled by someone with group facilitation skills and/or previous experience running focus groups. Data from focus groups must not be taken as representative of an entire population, rather as good information from some individuals that represent a part of the population. This information can be compared to information found from other methods of data collection.

One crisis center in Texas held focus groups with various groups in their communities (e.g., civic groups and a ministerial alliance) to find out what these groups thought the causes of sexual violence were in their community. The facilitators explained the ecological model to each group, gave some basic local statistics on sexual violence and then asked the members to talk about each level of the ecological model as it related to community specific risk factors for sexual violence. The facilitators took notes and made a conscious effort to step back and just listen to the focus group members as they discussed what they thought contributed to sexual violence in their community. The notes from these groups were to be complied to get a picture of what community members believe is contributing to sexual violence so that they can look for patterns. This is an excellent example of how focus groups can be helpful in planning primary prevention initiatives.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informants are individuals who are likely to have a depth of knowledge about the way your community (or a segment of the community) works, including who the key players are, how decisions are made, etc. These individuals are often people in formal leadership positions with organizations or government entities. However, if you have identified informal leaders through some of your efforts, it's advisable to interview them as well. This is a great tool for identifying people and organizations that hold various kinds of power within the community and thereby identifying different potential partners (or barriers). You might consider asking each person you interview to name one or two people who they consider to be leaders in the community or in specific sectors of the community.

"But most compelling was the realization that the organization had settled into a routine that prioritized 'services' over social justice and failed to integrate a race and class analysis into our work. We asked ourselves, 'Are we really making a difference? If not, why not and how can we change?'" [14]

Key informant interviews can be done in person or over the phone, with the face-to-face interviews naturally offering more of a chance for relationship building with the interviewee. Additionally, it's helpful to have a list of standard questions that you will ask each person to guide you and also to allow you to compare answers.

One good example of this in terms of sexual violence prevention would be to interview sexual assault advocates and counselors about the cases they see. Ask them if they can identify patterns or similarities in the situations of their clients. Additionally, moving beyond data specific to sexual violence, you could interview individuals about other issues related to sexual violence. For example, interviewing youth and adults who work with youth about sexual harassment in schools and about youth attitudes in relation to issues like gender equality, racism, homophobia, etc. You could also interview individuals who work with families. Keep in mind that key informants' perspectives are often those of someone in a position of leadership and may not necessarily represent the views or perspectives of the people at-large.

[14] Tapp. A. (July/August 2006).

Existing Data

There are quite a few sources of existing data that might be helpful in assessing your community for the purposes of planning primary prevention strategies. Such existing data can include:

- US Census data to establish the demographics (breakdowns of gender, age, socioeconomic status, marital status, etc) of your county,
- police reports related to sexual assaults or attempted sexual assaults,
- the FBI Uniform Crime Report (UCR) for information on forcible rapes in your county

You might also want to look into local data sources on issues such as

- employment discrimination,
- sexual harassment and/or bullying,
- alcohol/drug use,
- and other related indicators.

The great thing about existing data sources is that they are usually easy to access, free or cheap, and, depending on who did the gathering and analysis, often of a relatively high quality. However, there may not be data on some important indicators, you may have too much data to make sense of it all, and some of it may be a bit misleading if not carefully interpreted. Existing data can help paint a picture of certain issues in your community and of the problem of sexual violence, but it will not necessarily give you a lot of information about how your community works. Existing data sources should only be used to supplement information you find via other methods. Especially when assessing your community for the purposes of planning primary prevention initiatives, other methodology must be used to gather more in-depth data.

Note:

When trying to identify community specific risk and protective factors for sexual violence, keep previous research and theories about sexual violence in mind to guide what you find. The CDC's ecological model is used to combine various theories (e.g., feminist and psychological) to show how multiple factors interact to make sexual violence more likely to occur. Many people have asked, "what if my community decides that sexual violence is caused by girls dressing provocatively and they want to address that in our prevention efforts." Rape myths are still prevalent, and that is why it is important to keep relevant theories at the core of your efforts. There are no theories of sexual violence that suggest that a victim's behavior causes sexual violence.

After Identifying Risk and Protective Factors

Once community specific risk and protective factors have been identified, it is time to plan short and long-term strategies to address those factors. Feel encouraged to do this in small chunks and don't feel pressured to address each and every risk factor identified in your community right away. Risk factors should be addressed strategically, target multiple levels of the ecological model, and utilize the LAA, if appropriate. As your efforts are implemented, your community will continue changing, and your efforts will need to be equally fluid to adapt to those changes.

APPENDIX

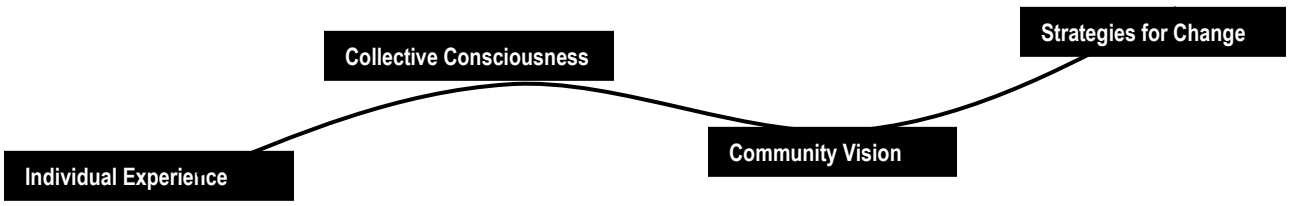
Popular Education

Contributed by Tim Love

Primary prevention of sexual violence requires that the community take a look beyond individual factors to change the environment that perpetuates the violence. It addresses community issues with community responses, and is inclusive of a wide variety of community members. Because primary prevention has a significant focus on community and environmental change, popular education presents itself as an excellent tool for the primary prevention of sexual assault.

Popular education is political education for everyday people. It involves people coming together to discuss problems of injustice, inequality and violence, and learning how to confront these issues collectively. It starts with peoples' lived experiences with violence and injustice, and moves to an understanding of how that violence affects the community and how the community can address it. The process of popular education utilizes critical thinking and an examination of history and oppression to move individuals from a place where they feel the injustice around them on a personal level to where they see how that connects to the experiences of other community members and community health as a whole. Finally, it moves the community to meaningful, strategic action to address the injustice and violence.

Popular education is biased education – it is not objective. It starts with an acknowledgement that there is injustice and violence, and that the sources of the violence and injustice lie within the current structure of society – its policies, practices and institutions. It inspires communities to create a vision of a just and violence-free world, as well as the strategies to get there.



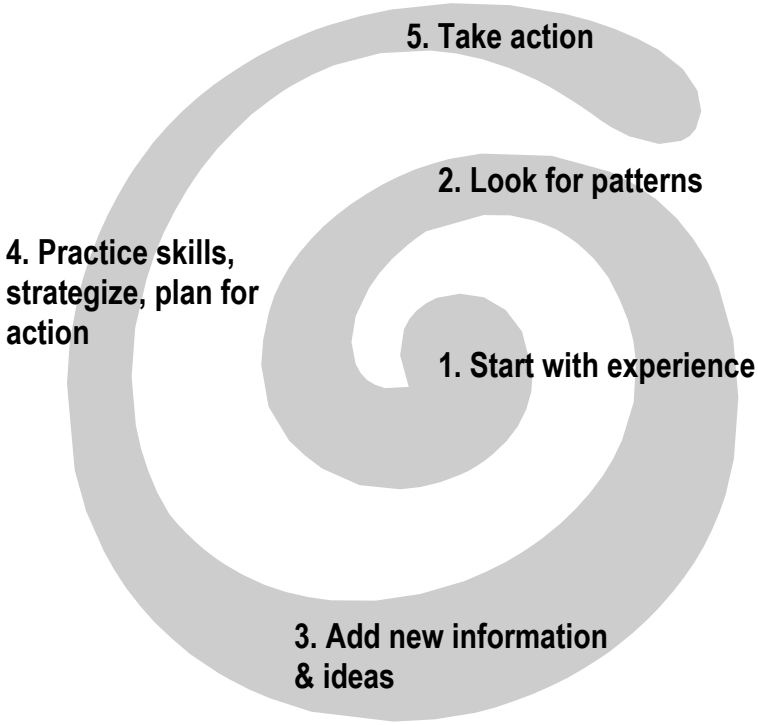
Popular educators use a variety of tools to address the specific needs of the community they work with. These tools are used to deepen understanding of the community we live in, and can include skits, poems, songs, role-plays, and guided discussions to raise critical questions about important issues. Popular education translates to different "movements" because it encourages the community to take on the injustices that are at the root of so many different forms of violence. It is precisely this trait that makes popular education so useful in primary prevention efforts regarding sexual violence.

Every member of our society has some level of knowledge about sexual violence. It may manifest as emotional intelligence, an understanding of how sexual violence makes him or her feel. The knowledge may be a realization of the fear sexual violence brings to someone's life. It may come from years of working in the movement, or it may come from years of experiencing, either as a perpetrator or victim, the oppression and violence of racism, homophobia, ageism or any other form of inequality that is a part of our society – the same inequality that contributes to the sexism that creates an environment where sexual violence directly touches the lives of so many of our community members.

Popular education recognizes each individual's unique knowledge must be valued and is crucial to the development of comprehensive strategies to prevent violence, including sexual violence. As we go out and do our work, we must be conscious that we are not the only experts in the conversation about sexual violence. Our contribution to primary prevention efforts may be to share victims' stories, or to bring a critical analysis of the factors of the current

structure of society that lead to those experiences of sexual violence. We can use popular education to escape the limitations of traditional education where one person or group of people is presented as the experts and everyone else are the students. Popular education's emphasis on valuing everyone's contribution increases community commitment and accountability to the efforts of primary prevention. It also uses a variety of tools and methods to reach folks who learn in different ways.

As popular educators, we can harness our communities' unique knowledge, skills and talents to prevent sexual violence. We can be encouraged to seek out new partners, and use tools ranging from skits, artwork, and writing to critical discussions to raise the consciousness of our entire community, create a vision of a community and world free from sexual violence, and employ comprehensive strategies to obtain that goal.



This model of popular education is used as a guide to plan and implement change This particular version is adapted from the book *Educating for a Change*. [15]

[15] Arnold, R., Burke, B., James, C., Martin, D., & Thomas, B. (1991). *Educating for a change*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Community Asset Mapping

Community asset mapping is a tool with many uses, including:

1. Identifying potential partners
2. Identifying existing community efforts
3. Identifying community strengths/resources
4. Outlining gaps

Asset mapping starts with the premise that each community has its own unique strengths and these community strengths can be mobilized to address issues or problems in the community. This is in contrast to strategies based on the medical model that identify all of the problems in a community and the symptoms of those problems in order to "fix" what's wrong.

Establishing a Mindset

If nothing else, community asset mapping is a good way to bring a positive focus to the work you are doing and to the way you view your community. Unfortunately, very few of us spend time thinking about the great aspects of our community or about what we love about our community. Recognizing what is working in your community can make the work seem less daunting and serve as a reminder of all the good work that has already been done.

Identifying Potential Partners

Through the asset mapping process, you will identify various types of community leaders. Some of these leaders will be formal leaders (i.e., those associated with organizations/agencies or government), grassroots leaders (i.e., those who are not in formal positions of power or who are not connected with an organization but are considered influential by others in the community), and individuals with the desire to become leaders. An additional benefit of this process is that it will help you identify individuals you would not otherwise have considered inviting to be a part of your sexual violence prevention efforts. As you identify these individuals, find a way to contact them and talk with them about the workgroup and about sexual violence prevention (Keeping in mind strategies discussed in the section on Recruiting Community Partners, p.11). When you approach them, remember to mention that you are doing so because they have been identified as an asset in the community and as a leader. Make sure they know that you believe that their skills would be valuable for the work you are doing. For example, note the difference in the following approaches:

Even if you engage in an asset mapping process before convening your community workgroup, it's a good idea to engage the workgroup members in adding to the asset mapping that you have begun, in case they have knowledge of other community assets. Feel encouraged to keep the asset mapping process dynamic, and continue adding to it as you discover more resources or as some resources leave the community.

1. Hi Mr. Soandso. My name is _____ and I am forming a community workgroup for sexual violence prevention in our community. As you know, sexual violence impacts everyone in the community, and the entire community should be responsible for addressing the problem. So, I am inviting you to be a part of our workgroup.

2. Hi Mr. Soandso. My name is _____ and I am forming a community workgroup for sexual violence prevention. Sexual violence is closely linked to issues of poverty and homelessness, so we were hoping to have someone on the workgroup who has some experience with those issues. Would you be interested?

3. Hi Mr. Soandso. My name is _____ . Do you have a minute to chat about a project I'm working on? I am working to organize the community to address the prevention of sexual violence. As a part of this process, I've been

assessing our community, and I have identified you as (a leader in/asset to) the community based on your previous experience working with homeless youth and your dedication, drive and commitment to social change. I think you would be a great asset in our work to end sexual violence, and I was hoping that we might be able to discuss the possibility of you serving on our workgroup.

These three approaches have a very different feel to them. Through the process of asset mapping and talking with community members and leaders, you are able to identify specific strengths of community leaders, thereby giving you an opportunity to personalize your message. The first two examples may or may not be effective, but the third one seeks to establish more of a connection with a specific person and is also a more deliberate approach, since this person has been identified as a leader or an asset to the community based on skills and experiences that are very relevant to sexual violence prevention.

Planning Strategies

One of the worst traps workgroups can fall into is that of planning efforts that duplicate existing efforts in the community. Unfortunately, this seems to happen frequently. Another benefit of community asset mapping is identification of existing efforts and systems of service delivery throughout your community. Thorough asset mapping probably even identify systems (formal or informal) of which you were previously unaware. Some of these systems might be relevant in your work to prevent sexual violence. After you have assessed community specific aspects of sexual violence and begin to plan for strategies to address those factors, consider tapping into the wonderful work that is already being done in your community and utilizing the assets you've identified. For example, if you have identified alcohol/drug use as a major contributing factor to sexual violence in your community and there are already alcohol/drug use prevention efforts in your community, is it possible to work with those groups to support their work and also to learn from their approach to further your ability to address issues of alcohol/drug use prevention?

The article that follows is a helpful beginning guide to asset mapping. Additionally, there are two helpful guides available online:

Bonner Foundation http://www.bonner.org/resources/modules/modules_pdf/BonCurCommAssetMap.pdf

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd/kelloggabcd.pdf

Identifying Community Assets and Resources

Reprinted from Community Tool Box: http://ctb.ku.edu
Contributed by Bill Berkowitz and Eric Wadud

Many community organizations focus on the needs or deficits of the community. And they should. Every community has needs and deficits; they ought to be corrected.

Yet it's also possible to focus on assets and strengths -- emphasizing what the community does have, not what it doesn't. Why? Because those assets and strengths can be used to meet those same community needs; they can improve community life.

To accomplish this, we first have to find out what those assets are. So in this section, we will learn how to identify community assets and resources. We'll also show how they can be harnessed to meet community needs and to strengthen the community as a whole.

But first:
What is a community asset?

Our definition is broad. A community asset (or community resource, a very similar term) is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. And this means:

- It can be a person -- the master mechanic down the street who can fix any car ever made. The stay-at-home mom or dad who organizes a playgroup. The church member who starts a discussion group on spirituality. Or a star high-school athlete, or coach, or cheerleader, or fan in the stands. These are all community assets.
- It can be a physical structure or place -- a school, hospital, church, library, recreation center, social club. It could be a town landmark or symbol. It might also be an unused building that could house a community hospice, or a second-floor room ideal for community meetings. Or it might be a public place that already belongs to the community park, a wetland, or other open space.
- It can be a business that provides jobs and supports the local economy.
- You are a community asset, too, and so are your friends, and the people you know, and the people you don't know yet. When you walk down the street, there are assets all around you. This is a very encouraging and promising way of seeing the world.
- And actually, in a true sense of the word, everyone living in the community is a community asset -- at least potentially so, and probably really so. This is good news, because it suggests that **everyone in the community can be a force for community improvement if only we knew what their assets are, and could put them to use.**

> One student of communities, John McKnight, has noted:
>
> "Every single person has capacities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given."
>
> Do you agree?

Why should you identify community assets?

Basically, because they can be used as a foundation for community improvement. And also because:

- External resources (e.g., federal and state money) often just aren't available, whether we like it or not. Therefore, the resources for change must come from within each community.
- Identifying and mobilizing community assets enables community residents to gain control over their lives. People can become active shapers of their own destinies, instead of passive clients receiving services from a variety of agencies.
- Improvement efforts are more effective, and longer-lasting, when community members dedicate their time and talents to changes they desire.
- Are there other reasons you can think of?

When should we identify community assets?

Every **day.** But here are some situations when it's especially desirable to do so:

- When you don't know what those assets are. This may be especially true when you are new to a community.
- When the community includes talented and experienced citizens whose skills are valuable but underutilized.
- When you can't provide traditional services, even if you wanted to, and are looking for other ways to build up the community.
- When you want to encourage residents to take pride in and ownership for local concerns and improvements.
- When you want to strengthen existing relationships and build new ones that will promote successful community development in the future.

So here are the key questions we face:
What kinds of assets are available right here in the community?
And:
How can I work together with the community to mobilize these assets to help the community achieve its goals?
Let's take up these questions one at a time.

How do you identify community assets?
Some questions before you begin

The techniques for identifying community assets aren't very hard. You don't need a lot of special training or expertise to do the job well.

Before you begin, though, you do need to answer some important questions. You can do this yourself, in the privacy of your own home. But we recommend strongly do so before you start. Here they are:

1. What is the <u>size</u> of the community, in your case? It could be an entire town (or even larger), or a smaller village. It could be a part of a town -- such as a neighborhood, or an even smaller community, such as a housing development or cluster of blocks.

   Obviously, the bigger the size, the more work is involved; and probably different study methods, too.

2. What <u>people</u> are available to do the work? You? You, plus some friends? A small group of people? A larger organization? Of course, you can also reach out to others, get them excited about the project, and recruit them to work with you.

In identifying community assets, compiling a list of key groups is one major approach. Another approach is to compile the assets of individuals. This can be challenging, because:

- There are many more people than groups. In a community of 50,000, you might find 500 distinct groups, a hypothetical but reasonable figure; but there would be 100 times that many people (500 x 100 = 50,000). To survey that many people will take a lot of time.
- The second major difference is that we often don't know people's assets unless we ask them. Their abilities and talents are often unknown. When listing organizations, if you encounter Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, or the Sunshine Nursery School, you immediately know what that group is about. But John or Jane Q. Citizen could be anything under the stars. We probably won't know until we ask them.

That takes more time again.

And if everyone is a community asset, as has been suggested before, that time adds up significantly.

For both these reasons, identifying individual assets often (but not always) takes place over a smaller community area -- a neighborhood, for example, or some other place where the task is more manageable.

But many of the above suggestions still apply. Here's how identifying individual community assets could be done in practice:

1. Answer the 5 "starting questions" previously given, just as for studying the assets of groups.

2. Decide on the geographic area you want to cover.

3. Decide on how many people you are going to ask within that area. Everyone? A certain fixed percentage? As many as you can find? Resolve this question in advance.

4. Draft some questions you want to ask, which will get you the information you need. Are you interested in skills, ("I can play the piano"), or interests ("I'd love to learn")?

If it is skills, what kind of skills? academic, artistic, athletic, interpersonal, manual, office, organizing, parenting, vocational...? Human beings have many talents, and you probably want to narrow down your search, at least a little.

If interests, what kind as well? These too come in many and varied types.
Keep in mind:

- **Why am I collecting this information?**
- **What do I want to use it for?**

5. Design a method by which these questions can be asked. For example:

- Will you mail out a survey?
- Will you (more simply) have a survey available to pick up?
- Will you go door to door?
- Will you call people on the phone?
- Will you have scheduled interviews?
- Will you meet people in groups?

An added bonus: When you ask people about their talents and abilities, that can also help encourage people to share them with others. So your survey may not only be identifying assets, but also promoting their use.

Each method has its pros and cons. For some of them, [click link to] see Chapter 7, Section 3: *Methods of Contacting Potential Members*.

6. Try out your questions on a sample group. Based on their answers and their suggestions, you will probably want to make revisions. That's a good idea, and a natural part of the process. Professional surveyors do the same thing, many times over.
7. You've now got a territory to cover, some good questions that meet your needs, and a method for getting the answers. Good work. Now, collect your data.

Mapping Community Assets

Once you have collected asset information, it's often especially helpful to put it on a map. Maps are good visual aids: when you can see the data right in front of you, understanding and insight often increases. There are several ways to go about this:

One mapping method is to find a large street map of your community, with few other markings. (Your local Planning Department may help here.) Then just mark with a dot, or tag, or push-pin (maybe color-coded by type) the geographic location of the groups and organizations you have found. The patterns that emerge may surprise you. You may see, for example, that certain locations have different numbers or types of associations. Those areas where few associations exist may be good targets for community development later on.

This type of mapping can also be done by computer. Software programs are available to help you do this. These programs are more flexible and sophisticated than paper -and-pushpin mapping, for with them you can create "overlays," visually placing one category of map over another, and changing these visual patterns with the push of a button.

It's also possible to diagram your resources on a non-literal map, but one which can more clearly show the linkages among different categories of assets .

Using the community assets you have identified

But whether or not you map your assets, the next and most important step is to make sure the assets you have identified get used. What you have done up to now is an achievement, because not every community has come so far. And yes, there is value just in expanding your own personal awareness of what exists in your community; and by sharing your results, you can also expand the awareness of others.

But the real value and payoff of identifying assets is in actions that will improve your community. You want to put your assets to work for you. If you have personal assets, such as savings, you probably don't want to hide them under a mattress. The same applies to the assets in your community. How can we maximize their return?

We'll itemize just a few possibilities below. Think about which might fit best for you, and what your own next steps might be:

- You can publish the assets identified and make them available to all community members. In doing so, you will stimulate public asset knowledge and use.

And what about help from the town itself? It might be possible to get town government backing for a project like this, for knowing the community's assets is surely in the town's interest.

3. How much time do you have for the task or how much time can you allow? Tonight? A week? A month? As much time as it takes?

The more time you have, the more assets you will be able to uncover. Hopefully, you've got more time than just tonight. But unlimited time is not required, nor even desired. This task is time-limited.

4. How much money, if any, is at your disposal? Or, how much can you get a hold of? We're talking about money for copying, mailing, incidental expenses, rather than for bigger-ticket items such as staff time. If identifying community assets can be made part of your regular work, that's certainly a plus, and worth pushing for; but this is frequently a volunteer type of community job.

The more people, time, and money available, of course the more you can do. But even if you have just yourself, no money, and little time, you can still do useful work in identifying assets that will be helpful to the community especially if nothing like this has ever been done before.

5. Lastly, a big question, perhaps the most important of all: What do you want to do with the results? Do you just want to keep these assets on file? Or share them with others? Or use them for action? If so, what action, and how?

This is a very basic question, too often neglected. Our opinion: If you can't answer this question clearly before you begin, then perhaps you're not ready to begin.

What comes next?
There are different approaches to identifying community assets. Each can be valid and useful. Which approach is right for you? The answer will depend in large part on your answers to the starting questions above. So, once again, answer them before you start.

> **Helpful hint:** These are common questions that are part of any social intervention or action attempt. If you can get in the habit of asking, and answering, them every time you start out, success will be more likely to find you.

But below are two basic approaches you could use in your own community. They complement each other. One of them focuses on the assets of groups -- specifically, associations, organizations, and institutions. The other focuses on individual people.

Identifying the assets of groups
The central task here is to take an inventory of all the groups (associations, organizations, and institutions) that exist in your community. You want to make a list. But how do you figure out what goes on the list in the first place? Some suggestions follow:

1. Get out a pad and start writing. Begin with what you know. Write down anything that comes to mind. You can always correct your list later.
   Idea: You can do this work by yourself; but it might be more useful and fun to work with others. Are there other people who could join you and make this a group project?

Another idea: *This is a great project for students or interns.*

2. Use other sources of information to add to your list. These can include:

- **The yellow pages** are a free, comprehensive, and often excellent source.
- **Town directories**, published for your community alone.
- **Lists of businesses**, probably available from the chamber of commerce.
- **Lists of organizations, which may have already been published.** Check your library or town hall.
- **Lists of organizations, which are not generally published.** For example, your local newspaper may have its own unpublished list that it could make available to you.
- **The local newspaper** itself. Perhaps the single best current source in print. Plus other print sources as well local newsletters, regional papers, whatever you can get your hands on.
- **Bulletin boards.** Physical bulletin boards, for sure; and also community-calendar type listings that might be found on local cable television.
- **Your friends and colleagues.** They may know about other lists available. And even if they don't, they may know of groups, organizations, and community assets that are not on anybody else's lists.

3. When you finish, you may have quite a long list. That is a good sign -- it means that there are a lot of assets in your community. To expand your list further, go to Step 4.

4. In Tool #1 at the end of this section, there are some categories that commonly appear on lists of community resources. Check this supplement, and check to see whether they are included on your list. If yes, good. If no, go back and consider including them, together with specific names.

Helpful hint: It's also possible to learn more about each community asset you have identified. You can inquire about available staffing, space, equipment, expertise, and willingness to help and get involved in a variety of ways. This will take more time; is it worth it for you? For some possible questions you can ask, see Tool #2 at the end of this section.

5. Refine and revise your list. (You can put it on a computer, if you haven't done so already.) You can also break your list down in several different ways: alphabetically, geographically, by type of function, by size, by public/private membership or governance, or however you want.

You now have an inventory of groups and group assets in your community -- the associations, organizations, and institutions that are a fundamental part of community life and that can be used for community improvement. Congratulations on a job well done!

But what do you do now?

- It's possible to put these assets on a map. For more information on how to do this, see the heading on Mapping Community Assets, coming up.
- It's now desirable to think about how your list (or map) of assets could be used. See the heading on *Using Community Assets,* toward the end of this section.

Identifying the assets of individuals

- You can target a particular neighborhood or other area for development, on the basis of the asset patterns you have found.
- You can use your knowledge of assets to tackle a new community project -- because now you may have more resources to work on that project than you originally thought.
- You can find new ways to bring groups and organizations together, to learn about each other's assets -- and perhaps to work collaboratively on projects such as the one above.
- You can publicize these assets, and attract new businesses and other opportunities to your community. In both this example, and the ones just above, you are using existing assets to create new ones. (This is what makes community work exciting!)
- You can create a school curriculum to teach local students about these assets, thus enriching their knowledge of the community and building community pride.
- You can consider creating a "community coordinator," (or some other title), someone who would deal with assets every day. The coordinator's new job would be to find the right assets in the community to respond to any request or community concern. Would this position pay for itself?
- You (or the new coordinator) can keep records how assets are used in the community, and use those records to generate ideas for improving asset exchange.
- You can set up structured programs for asset exchange, which can range from individual skill swaps to institutional cost-sharing.

You can establish a process by which community assets keep getting reviewed, perhaps on a regular basis. New assets are always coming on the scene; it's good to keep up to date on them. By so doing, the whole asset-identification process can become a regular part of community life.

Resources

McKnight, J. (1992). "Building community". AHEC Community Partners Annual Conference, Keynote address. Northwestern University: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research.

McKnight, J. L. (1992). Mapping community capacity. Chicago, IL: Northwestern University: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research.

Moore, M. (1994). Community capacity assessment: A guide for developing an inventory of community-level assets and resources. Santa Fe, NM: New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department.

Tools

Tool #1

Community capacity inventory

Here's a preliminary inventory of community capacities as described by local yellow pages, city/county planning departments, the chamber of commerce, and volunteer placement agencies. In this example, assets are organized by sector. List the name, address, and phone number of a contact person who can give you more information on who and what you find.

Grass roots or citizens' associations

- all local neighborhood organizations
- community centers
- seniors' groups
- local officials, politicians, and leaders

Institutions

- local public schools, universities, and community colleges

- public hospitals or clinics
- any publicly funded or private educational institution
- state or federal agencies
- municipal libraries
- police officers and other emergency personnel
- parks and municipal pools or golf courses

Community-based organizations

- housing organizations
- food kitchens and emergency housing shelters
- halfway houses, substance abuse homes, domestic violence shelters
- churches
- clinics and counseling centers
- advocacy groups for environment, safety, drug abuse reduction, et cetera

Private sector

- banks
- chamber of commerce
- businessmen's/businesswomen's associations
- local businesses

Labeled populations

- senior citizens
- local musicians
- local artists
- immigrant populations
- those receiving public assistance, food stamps, Medicaid or Medicare
- youth
- college students

Tool #2

Questions to ask while capacity mapping

Conducting interviews during community capacity mapping will help you collect information about the different associations, organizations, and relationships that exist in the community. What follows is a sample of the questions you can find out more about community assets.

Name:
Occupation:
Address:
Telephone Number:
Name of Organization:
Description:

Resources:

1. How many people are part of your organization?
   - Staff
   - Volunteers
   - Members or contributors
   - Board members
   - Clients
2. How often do your members gather? Do you gather outside of regular meetings?

3. What kind of funding does your organization have? Where else do you get support?
4. Where does your organization meet? What other spaces does your organization have access to?
5. What kind of equipment does your organization have access to?
    - Office?
    - Computer?
    - Audio-visual or video?
    - Computers?
    - Mechanical?
    - Other?
6. What kind of written media materials/newsletters does your organization have?
7. How does your organization keep its members up to date on activities and staff changes?
8. Which of your organization's resources would you be willing to make accessible to other community members?
9. What kinds of services does your organization provide to the community? How do you make these services known to the public? What kinds of projects are your organization involved in now? What has your organization accomplished thus far?
10. How many of your staff members live in the community served by your organization?
11. Where do you purchase your supplies and equipment, go for repair services, etc.?
12. What are your organization's most valuable resources and strongest assets?
13. What other organizations do you work with, personally? What other organizations does your group sponsor events with? Share information with? Share resources or equipment with?
14. Who else does work or provides similar services to the community as those provided by your organization?
15. Does your group belong to any other associations? What kinds of special events does your organization take part in?
16. What kind of associations or relationship does your organization have with local businesses and banks?
17. What other groups or sub-populations does your organization support or advocate for?
18. What kind of new projects would your organization be interested in taking on, directly related to your mission? Indirectly or outside of your mission?
19. What other projects or movements are you involved in that serve youth, the elderly, people with disabilities, the fine arts community, people receiving public assistance, immigrant or minority populations?
20. How feasible is it for your organization to get involved in more projects, more community development/health promotion efforts?
21. What kind of changes would you like to see in the community in the next five years? How would you effect these changes?

Resources

In addition to those sources cited within the text of the guidebook, the following resources may be helpful for finding additional information.

Primary Prevention

Print

Cohen, L., Chávez, V. & Chehimi, S. (Eds.) (2007). *Prevention is primary: Strategies for community well-being*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Davis, R. Fujie Parks, L. & Cohen, L. (2006). Sexual violence and the spectrum of prevention: Towards a community solution. Enola, PA: National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

Web

Prevent Connect www.preventconnect.org
PREVENT Institute www.prevent.unc.edu/
Prevention Institute www.preventioninstitute.org

Organizational Changes

Tapp. A. ((July/August 2006). Reclaiming our social justice organizations. Grassroots fundraising journal, 4-6.
pdf available www.grassrootsfundraising.org/magazine/feature25_4.pdf
www.safehousealliance.org/index.cfm

Popular Education

Center for Popular Education www.cpe.uts.edu.au/index.html

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault

6200 La Calma ♦ Suite 110
Austin, Texas 78752
www.taasa.org