CONNECTIONS FOR PREVENTION:
Networking Strategies For
Alcohol Abuse Prevention Planning

DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROGRAMS

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This volume, *Connections for Prevention: Networking Strategies for Alcohol Abuse Prevention Planning,* and its five companions:

    Building a Successful Task Force for Prevention Planning

    Community Action Guide: Controlling Billboards in Your Neighborhood

    Keeping on Track: Setting Useful Goals for Community-Based Prevention Planning

    Working with Clergy and Congregations for. Alcohol. Problem Prevention

comprise part of the final report of contract DADP-A-0134-7 between the California Health Research Foundation, its sub-contractor Evaluation, Management and Training (EMT) Group, Inc. and the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (DADP). Together these manuals comprise a basic reference source for those interested in developing, implementing or assessing community-based prevention programs.

The project involved two separate evaluations of community prevention efforts. One assessment examined six community-based prevention planning projects and was initiated during the final months of the two-year contract that each of the six organizations had with DADP. The second evaluation examined the start-up operations of two prevention programs, one in a Black community, the other in a Latino community. We were able to monitor and asses these two programs throughout their entire grant period.

The accepted way of presenting research findings is usually through the final report. However, because of the richness and usefulness of the information collected, and the need to ensure its widespread availability- to the. field, CHRF and EMT, with DADP encouragement, developed these manuals as the best way to report our findings.

The term "network" has taken on many new meanings during the past fifteen years. Chief among these meanings is the shift from using the word strictly as a noun -- such as in referring to a television network, a spy network, a network of highways, etc. -- to creating the verb "networking". Networking is something we all are urged to do. Career advancement is based on effective networking. Business sales can be increased by canny networking. One's ability to make friends, even meet a suitable spouse, are said to be improved by active networking. In a society that has become increasingly fragmented, fast-paced and transient, people have adopted the concept of "networking" to replace the stronger ties that existed within a past society that tended to stay put.

Likewise, the concept of networking has found an important niche within the sphere of human services. It fulfills a particularly critical role in implementing strategies to prevent social problems and to promote well-being. Whether the overall goal is to change people's knowledge, attitude and behavior about an issue such as alcohol abuse, or to change the environment within a community that contributes to alcohol problems, effective networking is key to making things happen.

Although networking is a term used frequently by people in the alcohol abuse prevention field, there is no common definition of the word. "Networking" and "network" are still fairly vague concepts that mean different things to different people. Although we may be expected to do it, there is a lack of specific description about how it is done effectively. This handbook hopes to fill that information gap.

The purpose of this handbook is to help people in the field of alcohol prevention -- including policy makers, practitioners, concerned service providers, and other interested citizens -- do their work more effectively. To do so, the handbook explores the concept of networking, and offers strategies and concrete examples taken from the alcohol prevention field. These examples are based on the experiences of EMT staff in evaluating alcohol prevention programs in California.

The handbook is divided into three chapters. Chapter One explores the definition of networks and networking, and describes their purposes, styles, and scope. Chapter Two takes a look at networking activities, and Chapter Three examines some of the lessons about networking learned in the field by prevention programs.

What networking is all about, ultimately, is making connections with people. That is also the heart of prevention work. It is hoped that this handbook might point the way to building stronger connections for effective networking, and ultimately for effective prevention.

WHAT IS A NETWORK?

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We can begin to answer the question "What is a network?" by taking a look at a general definition:

> *A network is a collection of individuals, groups, organizations, constituency groups and agencies within a community who have mutual interests and/or common needs, and who link together either formally -- as do coalitions -- or informally by sharing information or working together on joint action towards common goals.*

How does this academic definition apply to the real world? All of us are members of several different networks simultaneously at any given moment in our lives. Take for example a person who is a social worker in a county program. Based on the previous definition, the following is a list of possible networks this person might belong to:

- County employees

- Human service professionals

- Social workers

- A coalition of community members working to change public policy regarding alcohol

- Alcoholics Anonymous members

- Parents of children attending a specific elementary school

- Church members

- Camping enthusiasts

- Regular attenders of local drama productions

- Neighbors

- Family members

- Jazz musicians

- Vietnam War veterans

These networks are all based on a particular social role that the social worker fulfills. Some of those roles are professional and occupational, as are the first four listed above. Others relate to the person's interests, such as camping, jazz and drama. Still others relate to family roles, while some, such as church member or neighbor, are community roles. Alcoholics Anonymous membership reflects yet another special interest and commitment, while Vietnam veteran refers to a role based on past experience.

Simply occupying one of the above roles does not necessarily mean that a person is part of a network. For example, if our social worker only played jazz saxophone in the privacy of his own garage, never spoke to other musicians or jazz appreciators, did not attend any performances nor read any jazz-related publications, he could effectively isolate himself from any network of jazz musicians. However, the moment he opens himself to communicating with others of similar interests, he becomes at least a peripheral member of that network. Thus, membership in a network is based on a person's willingness to make at least a minimum level of contact with others who share the same social roles.

FUNCTIONS OF NETWORKS

There are three main functions of any given network: 1) reinforcement and support of a social role; 2) information flow; and 3) action for mutual benefit. Each of these will be discussed in depth.

Network Function #1: Reinforcement of a Social Role

Membership in a network acts to reinforce a person's self-perception in a specific social role, as well as the perceptions of others. For example, our social worker's sense of himself as a jazz musician will tend to be stronger if he communicates regularly with other jazz musicians, "jams" with them, etc.

In addition, membership in a network can help shape a person's attitudes, beliefs, and values about that social role. For example, through his participation in Alcoholics Anonymous, the social worker is incorporating a certain set of beliefs and values about his experience as a recovering alcoholic.

Sometimes the different networks to which an individual belongs can reinforce conflicting values and beliefs. Let us assume that the social worker is a newly recovering alcoholic. He will probably discover that he must remove himself from some of his former social networks that reinforce alcoholic behavior. (Perhaps that is what keeps him playing his saxophone alone in his garage these days.)

We also can find ourselves in conflict with the values and beliefs of other social roles and networks in which we nevertheless choose to remain. The social worker may feel estranged from his family of origin, which is dysfunctional due to alcoholism, but he feels a responsibility to maintain contact, however minimal. His membership in his family will be a painful experience, requiring that he work hard to maintain his newly developing values as a recovering person while developing compassionate detachment from his family's dysfunctional behavior.

Network Function #2: Information Flow

Channelling information to and among members is a key function of a network. Information channels take several forms. The first category of information channels are those that exist within the network itself. They include:

- Word of mouth
- Written materials produced by the network members, such as newsletters, correspondence, mailings
- Meetings
- Special events

The second category of information channels are those outside of the network. They include:

- TV, radio
- Newspapers, magazines
- Public advertising, such as billboards, posters, fliers, etc.

The information channels used in a network in a given instance will depend on two factors: 1) whether the network is formal or informal, and 2) whether the information is being generated from inside or outside the network.

Formal Versus Informal Networks

These attributes of a network are actually two ends of a continuum, with most networks occurring somewhere in between. In addition, a given network may change over time in its degree of formality or informality.

The most formal of networks are organizations. An organization is a group of people who come together for specific goals, who set clear boundaries and criteria for membership, and who create a structure for doing the organization's work that is recognized by the membership.

In the example of our social worker, his membership in the network of all county employees is a function of his membership of a particular organization – county government. He may also belong to an employee's advocacy organization or a union – another network. Within formal networks or organizations exist informal ones. For example, the social worker may also be a member of an informal network of county employees who organize a holiday food and toy drive for homeless families.

Informal networks are those whose membership boundaries are fluid, and who have little or no organizational structure. The most informal network our social worker belongs to is the group of people he encounters whenever he attends a local drama production. As a member of this network he is probably on a number of mailing lists of different theater companies in town, and possibly subscribes to a magazine related to the theater. However, he has not joined any theater organization, pays no dues to any group, attends no meetings. He belongs to a very informal, loose network of theater supporters.

The more formal a network is, the more likely it will use its selected information channels more frequently and regularly, and will probably use a greater variety of channels than an informal network. The more informal the network, the more it will rely on word of mouth communication, and will infrequently use other channels.

Information Source: Inside or Outside?

The second factor influencing how information channels are used in a network is whether or not the information originates from inside or outside the network. All networks have internal communication channels that may include word of mouth, written communication,

meetings, or special events. Networks may also use external channels, such as TV, radio, news media, and public advertising, to get the word out to members on the periphery or to potential members.

If someone who is not a member wishes to get information disseminated within a network, access to internal channels -- which are the most efficient -- will be more or less restricted. Gaining access to those channels is a matter of gaining the trust and cooperation of enough network members who will then activate the internal channels.

Network Function #3: Action for Mutual Benefit

The third function of a network is to provide a way for members to take action together for their mutual benefit. Examples from our social worker's networks might include the following:

Network	Action
County Employees	Represent employee interests to management
AA Members	Mutual support in recovery process
Parents of Children in an Elementary School	Raise funds for the school
Neighbors	Form a neighborhood watch group
Vietnam Veterans	Form support groups for veterans with post-traumatic stress syndrome

Not all networks take action, and not all members of networks take action when others in the network initiate it. For example, the social worker knew few of his neighbors, much less worked together with them, until someone organized a Neighborhood Watch meeting. He just recently became involved in a parent fundraising effort for his children's school. He was a member of both of those networks previously, but his membership was extremely loose, informal, and not action-oriented.

CONCLUSIONS

Because we all occupy many different social roles, we are all members of many different networks. Some of these intersect with others; some are quite separate. We move in and out of some networks, while remaining permanent members of others. Our involvement in a network may be distant or quite involved. A network's values and beliefs may be congruent with our core values and beliefs, or they may conflict. A network may be formal and highly structured, loose and informal, or somewhere in between.

We belong to networks because they reinforce and support social roles, facilitate the flow of information among members, and act as a vehicle through which we can take action for the mutual benefit of all in the network.

With this understanding of what a network is, the next chapter will take a look at what we mean by the word "networking" when implementing alcohol prevention programs within a community.

Chapter Two

ELEMENTS OF
EFFECTIVE NETWORKING

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A community is a collection of many intersecting networks: hidden and obvious, formal and informal, relatively open or closed, with characteristics that shift and change.

This notion of hidden and informal networks is very important to people involved in implementing alcohol prevention strategies. They will themselves be members of many different networks, and logically will draw upon those affiliations in their efforts to accomplish their goals. But they will not have access to, or even knowledge of, many key networks of other people they wish to reach. Thus their ability to accomplish their goals will be limited unless they undertake careful networking activities. The overall purpose of networking, then, is to create more intersections among certain networks in a community.

The rest of this chapter explores the concept of networking, and describes specific steps in effective networking.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NETWORKING AND PREVENTION

Prevention approaches are usually aimed at changing a person's knowledge, attitudes and/or behavior. The previous chapter proposed that networks fulfill three important functions: reinforcing social roles, channelling information, and taking collective action. These functions correspond closely to the three purposes of prevention:

Functions of Networks	*Purposes of Prevention*
Reinforcing social roles	Change attitudes
Information channelling	Change knowledge
Collective action-taking	Change behavior

Prevention methodologies, such as refusal skill curricula, media campaigns, support group formats, etc., have been developed to address the challenge of changing an individual's attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Likewise, when a group of people wish to organize others to deal with prevention on a community level, the same kinds of challenges exist in dealing with networks.

In other words, how can we reach individuals in a target group who belong to networks that reinforce social roles and attitudes that are contradictory to the attitudes and values associated with prevention? For example, how can we best gain access to individuals in a bureaucratic network that tends to screen out information that is not "properly channelled" or that is too "politically sensitive"? Or, how can we move a network of service providers to form an ongoing coordinating group when collective action has not been a norm in the past? . These are the challenges of networking.

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Here is a general definition of networking:

> *Networking refers to establishing effective linkages with key individuals, groups, and existing networks within a community in order to improve communication and to work together toward mutual goals.*

Further, networking may occur in one of these ways:

- Gaining access to existing networks,
- Strengthening existing relationships with various networks,
- Creating new networks.

PURPOSES OF NETWORKING IN PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Prevention planners and implementors use networking for a variety of purposes. They include the following:

1. Developing recognition, legitimacy, and support;

2. Obtaining community input on needs assessment and problem identification, priority-setting, solution development, and other decisions;

3. Recruiting participants for program activities such as community meetings and special events, as well as volunteers to work on the project;

4. Developing or improving coordination and referral mechanisms among providers;

5. Attracting members of target populations to new or existing services.

The following sections will discuss each purpose in more depth.

Purpose #1: Developing Recognition, Legitimacy and Support

In simple terms, these qualities occur as a result of the following:

- *Recognition* is a result of repeated, consistent and effective communication of the goals and activities of a project;

- *Legitimacy* results when people in formal or informal roles of authority acknowledge the appropriateness and importance of your program's efforts;

- *Support* results when people are willing to take some action on behalf of your program.

Efforts to develop these qualities should continue throughout the life of a project. However, when a prevention effort is begun in a community, developing support, legitimacy and recognition usually is the central task. To do so, program planners should network with two types of people: 1) those in formal roles of authority and influence within relevant organizations, and 2) those who are informal opinion leaders in a community.

Networking with Formal Networks

The first group is easier to identify because they occupy visible roles of leadership. They will include administrators, policy makers and key service providers of organizations and groups that are directly related to the subject or target group of the prevention effort. Thus, in the case of a prevention program to serve high risk youth, networking needs to be done with people from the following fields:

- Schools, including continuation schools

- Law enforcement

- Juvenile justice

- Alcohol services

- Other relevant human services (such as Children's Protective Services, youth and family services agencies, youth job training agencies, health clinics, etc.)

- Churches

- Youth-oriented recreational and social organizations (such as YM/YWCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.)

- Local political leadership

Networking activities with members of these groups include personally contacting them to introduce the project, inviting them to serve on an Advisory Group or Steering Committee, and soliciting their views about priorities and needs (more about this in the next section.) It is useful to strategize in advance whose support will influence others, and to approach these key people first. In addition, to be an effective networker at this early stage means familiarizing yourself with the history of each organization regarding prevention issues, and being willing to listen and accommodate as much as possible each person's and organization's needs and agendas.

Networking with Informal Networks

Networking with informal opinion leaders in a community is just as important as with formal leaders. Networking only with people in formal institutional roles of leadership will result in contact with limited networks that may or may not have good access to the people whom the project aims to serve. Particularly for communities of ethnics of color, and/or who are economically disadvantaged, the formal system of services often is perceived by the community as distant and sometimes hostile to their needs. It is essential to reach beyond the formal network into the more hidden, informal networks.

Personal contact is essential to informal networking. Meeting people face to face, on their turf, to explain and, more importantly, to listen to their concerns, is at the heart of this type of networking. In addition, prevention implementors should be prepared to participate in the life of a community on a more personal level to gain access to informal networks.

For example, when starting up a prevention program in a primarily Latino community, a prevention worker shifted her business from her own town to the community in which she was working. She shopped, had her car repaired, and patronized dry cleaners and hair stylists in that community. She attended other community events not immediately related to the projects, including street fairs and cultural events. She appeared in the community after working hours and on weekends. In short, she "adopted" the community in which she was working as a way to learn more about local needs, resources, and networks, meet local people, and develop legitimacy, support, and recognition.

Consistency, delivering what you promise, and responding to people's stated needs are absolutely critical to effective networking at the informal level. Legitimacy depends upon scrupulous attention to these characteristics.

Identifying informal networks in a community is more difficult than identifying formal ones. As with formal networks, informal networks are those which come into contact with people whom you are trying to serve. In the example of a program for high risk youth in a Black community, those who are the target population — or, the intended primary beneficiaries* of the prevention effort — have been defined as school-aged youth between the ages of five and 13. Secondary beneficiaries are their families, and the entire community can be considered additional beneficiaries.

The task is to identify informal networks in which these high risk youth and their families participate. For youth these may include:

- Schools
- Friendship networks
- Churches
- Neighborhoods
- Recreational activity and sports groups
- Gangs
- Street networks

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*The term "beneficiaries" has been used by Friedner Wittman to replace the term "target populations". In an environmental approach to prevention the focus of change is not on a target group of people who are affected most severely by alcohol problems, but rather on environmental factors which contribute to the problems. Thus, those who are most affected by the problem become the primary beneficiaries of the solution. Friedner M. Wittman, "Community Strategies for Preventing Alcohol Problems Among Young People: An Empowering Perspective". Keynote address for "Youth and Alcohol: A Forum on Strategies and Public Policy in California", sponsored by the Center for Human Development under a contract with the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, March 18, 1987.

For families and parents, the networks are as wide as the community, including:

- Businesses (where people purchase both goods and services)
- Churches
- Recreational/entertainment settings (including clubs, bars, theaters, etc.)
- Job settings
- Neighborhoods
- Friendship networks
- Civic and social organizations

Gaining access to these networks is key to effective prevention efforts. It also takes a much longer time, requires intensive personal contact and shared experiences, and is generally much more demanding of prevention workers than networking at the formal level. The following sections examine other purposes for networking, and also discuss how both formal and informal networks can be accessed for each purpose

Purpose #2: Obtaining Community Input for Decision Making

Many prevention programs use networking to gather community input for program decision making. In addition, some programs involve community members as decision makers in program planning and implementation. The result is increased community ownership of the issue and empowerment to act on solutions.

Gathering community input, or involving community members as decision makers, may take several forms, including:

- Needs assessments
- Problem identification workshops
- Interviews with key informants
- Creation of Advisory Groups or Steering Committees
- Community forums

Success in any of these activities rests on the ability to gain access to many different networks so that a wide range of opinion and information is included. In addition, some methods are more workable with certain networks than with others. The main networking challenges here are as follows:

- To get the word out among network members that their input or involvement in decision making is desired;

- To tailor methods of involvement to the needs and characteristics of the network; and

- To create enough interest within networks to inspire people to become involved.

Purpose #3: Recruiting Participants for Program Activities/Volunteers

Once activities are planned, whether they are community forums, educational offerings, workshops, media events, etc., the primary task becomes to attract participants. The networking challenges are twofold: to get the word out to the appropriate people you wish to attract, and to motivate them to sacrifice their free time to attend your event.

Getting the word out effectively means knowing who your target audience is, what networks are most likely to channel information about your activities, and in what form that information should appear. For example, let us assume you have planned a community forum where the over-abundance of retail alcohol outlets and billboard advertising in the community will be discussed. You want a large turnout for two reasons: 1) to demonstrate local support for the benefit of the press who will be attending, and policy makers who will hear about the event, and 2) to get people involved and interested in taking future action on the issue.

You decide that while you would like everyone in the community to be concerned enough about the issue to attend, there are certain subgroups that are more likely to be interested. These might include the following:

- The recovering community
- Business owners
- Block clubs and other neighborhood organizations
- Social action agencies/organizations
- Parents groups
- Churches
- School boards, possibly some school personnel

While you will publicize the event to the general public through newspaper articles, TV, and radio spots, you decide to focus on these networks for more intensive efforts to get the word out. Personal contact will be the centerpiece of your efforts. This can include going door-to-door, meeting with key network members, attending meetings of organizations, speaking to groups, etc. In addition, you may choose to place posters in strategic places, along with fliers that people can pick up and take home with them. You will need to

consider the likely reading abilities of your target audience. Often, repeated TV and radio spots are effective ways of reaching members of a target audience that are not likely to read newspapers, who are not able to read fliers and posters, or who are not plugged into other word-of-mouth networks.

Getting the word out involves lots of people spreading the message, preferably people who are members of the networks you want to reach. Therefore it is important that you spend time making your contacts and building support and credibility among community members who will be willing to act as emissaries to carry the message further.

It is not sufficient, however, to simply get the word out. Something in the message must motivate people to change their routines and attend your event. Motivational factors can include the following:

- Using trusted local people to spread the word, who can vouch for the value of the event.

- Designing fliers and posters that incorporate images and design that are both familiar and that have positive, inclusive connotations to the network being targeted. This would include culturally appropriate designs, local photographs, work by a local artist, etc.

- Using appropriate language, including good translations, appropriate reading levels, plain language (not jargon or academic language), etc.

- Including endorsements from influential local people.

- Offering logistical help, such as transportation or child care.

- Advertising that food and drink will be available at the event.

- Communicating clearly what the participant will get out of attending -- how attending will benefit the individual and family.

Purpose #4: Developing Improved Coordination and Referral Among Providers

Often, service providers within a community exist in isolation from one another. Services are not coordinated, gaps exist, or duplication occurs. Effective networking can improve this situation and it is crucial if a prevention program wants existing providers to refer potential clients or participants to their services and activities.

Prevention program implementors have strengthened interagency networks in several ways. These include:

- Creating resource directories

- Catalyzing regular interagency networking meetings

- Sponsoring events in partnership with other agencies

- Supporting other agency activities

- Developing written referral and coordination contracts

- Holding regular meetings with individual agencies with which the prevention program has an important referral relationship

Of course, prevention program implementors will want to link in with any existing relevant interagency coordinating networks. This would include joining networks that meet regularly, getting on newsletter mailing lists, and serving as members of committees or Boards created by other organizations.

Purpose #5: Attracting People To Your Services

Prevention programs can offer a wide variety of services, including support groups; student assistance programs; peer counseling; after-school activity programs; early intervention counseling or groups; and trainings for impactors such as teachers, parents, clergy, and other helping professionals. Effective networking can help you attract the people who need your services the most.

Networking for this purpose requires a combination of all of the previously described purposes. That is why offering direct services in the early stages of a program's development is often problematic. In the beginning of a new program, two factors can frustrate direct services. The first will occur if the program personnel are not known in the community, and thus lack credibility. In this case, without adequate networking as described in the previous purposes, people may not be willing to refer others, or self-refer to your services.

The second stumbling block to offering services early on occurs in programs where the organization or personnel offering the service are well-known to the community. In this case, there may be an immediate rush of referrals that overwhelm the staff's time and ability to do the essential networking that will help the program survive. If the organization is a

public agency, such as a county Department of Alcohol Services, there may be competing demands for services placed on the new program since other agencies and constituencies in the community may perceive that the county should be doing something about everybody's priorities simultaneously. In other words, public agencies have more constituencies to satisfy than private organizations.

Prevention programs who take their time in building strong networks for the previously-described functions typically start off slowly and provide limited services at first. As programs become better known, and as they learn more about local needs, services will take on a shape most suited to the community. Programs also will create the credibility and trust needed to attract people to services.

People make their way to services in either one of two ways: they are referred directly by someone, such as another agency or helping professional, or possibly a family member or friend. Or, they hear about the service somehow, and decide on their own to come. A prevention program will want to capitalize on all of these referral and self-referral mechanisms in attracting appropriate people. Effective networking can make this happen.

Networking for Referrals by Others

People from other agencies and organizations will refer appropriate consumers to your program if one or more of these conditions exist:

- People in the agency who actually work with clients know your program staff (they have met them, worked with them, etc.);

- The agency staff has developed a trust and respect for the quality and reliability of your staff and services;

- Agency staff understand what your services are;

- There is a formal interagency referral agreement;

- Your services are not in competition with other services which the agency has traditionally referred to with satisfactory results.

Sometimes agency personnel will refer to your program if you are the "only game in town", regardless of whether any of the preceding conditions are met. However, as other agencies gain experience with your services, they will keep referring to you only if trust and confidence develop.

When establishing referral relationships with an agency, it is important to deal both with administrators and with line staff. Although building relationships with an agency's administration is important networking for the overall benefit of your program, it is line staff who actually tell clients about your services. Thus, making presentations at agency staff meetings, having individual meetings with line staff members, or identifying key staff members who are informal leaders in their agency, and who could spread the word about your service, are all effective ways to network for effective referrals.

This is particularly true with agencies where the administration may be indifferent or wary of your services. School systems are a good example. It is sometimes more effective to begin with one sympathetic teacher who invites you into her classroom as a guest speaker, than to go directly to the top to ask permission from a superintendent or principal. Again, it is important to do your homework on this subject. Find out what the administrator's biases, style and past actions have been on similar issues before approaching him or her about your program. Research the relationship between your organization and the agency you are contacting. Without this preparation, you may be 'blind-sided" with a reaction and questions you cannot deal with.

Networking for Self-Referrals

People usually self-refer to a service because they have heard good things about it from people they trust. Or, they have had a positive experience with the sponsoring organization in the past. Or, the service is endorsed by people they trust, or is being offered in a setting in which they feel comfortable. Most people do not feel comfortable seeking services from an organization with which they feel no personal connection.

Your program can increase self-referrals in these ways:

- Provide consistently good services in the community that create satisfied customers who will spread the word;

- Provide the service in a location and setting comfortable to the prospective clientele. This could be a school, church, library, or similar 'neutral setting". It is often wise to avoid providing prevention services in settings which carry a stigma, such as agencies that are identified as mental health or alcohol and drug programs. (This may not be the case with recovering people, of course.)

- Ask trusted community members and organizations to endorse and help you advertise the services. This could include clergy, 'natural helpers", day care center staff, etc. These people can also make direct referrals.

- Advertise your services in places that members of your target group frequents. But be careful that you do not advertise primarily in settings that may have strong negative connotations to people, such as the Welfare Department, Children's Protective Services, Probation, etc.

- Get local, trusted leaders to make public service announcements for you, or to allow their names to appear on posters and brochures endorsing your service.

The next chapter will take a closer look at some of the learnings about networking gained through experience by prevention programs.

NETWORKING IN ACTION: LESSONS LEARNED

NETWORKING IN ACTION: LESSONS LEARNED

Networking has been a strategy for prevention program development in many communities across the state. This chapter will take a look at some of the lessons learned from the experience of these programs.

NETWORKING STYLES: PERSONAL OR ORGANIZATIONAL?

Prevention program developers usually emphasize one of two styles of networking. The first is a *personal,* one-to-one style that emphasizes developing strong relationships with many different individuals in the community. The goal is to, gain access to and credibility within, informal networks. Although some of these relationships will be with members of organizations relevant to the prevention effort, the emphasis is not on forging linkages between organizations, but rather on building trust and confidence with individuals. A prime example of the personal networking approach is that of the previously described prevention coordinator working in a Latino community who took her personal and professional business to the town in which she worked.

At the other end of the spectrum is the *organizational* style. In this approach, prevention workers focus on important organizations and institutions, and build relationships with key individuals within these agencies. The goal is to establish linkages that will outlast the individual worker, and to use the collective weight of the involved organizations to bring about some change.

A clear example of this approach is a prevention program in a predominantly Black community. The program focused on forging alliances among several existing community organizations to implement confrontational tactics to reduce the number of retail liquor outlets and billboards advertising alcohol. The prevention organizers used this approach for two reasons. First, organizers recognized that existing organizations had access to a variety of key networks in the community; thus, by linking these networks together for a new purpose, a power base could be created in a relatively short period of time. Second, by developing ownership of the issues among existing groups, continued action on the issue could be taken beyond the life of the prevention project.

Disadvantages and Benefits of Each Style

Both styles are effective in achieving different goals. The personal style is most useful in communities where there are few existing organized networks and resources, and when the prevention program's goals are broad and flexible. It is also appropriate when the goal is to develop services that are culturally sensitive and that will fit well with the community's way of doing things.

However, heavy reliance on the personal approach can be extremely demanding of staff time and energy. As a part of this networking approach, staff often find themselves responding to individual needs on an ad hoc basis as a way to build credibility and trust. Staff then may become overwhelmed with advocacy and direct service responsibilities, and lose the ability to network on a broader scope.

The organizational approach is appropriate when there are several community organizations which have clearly defined roles with regards to the prevention issue being addressed, and where turf conflicts are likely to exist. In addition, the organizational approach is necessary when gaining access to a target population is paramount. For example, a prevention program that wished to offer diversion counseling to first-time youthful offenders needed to forge strong linkages with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system.

Heavy reliance on the organizational approach, however, may keep prevention workers at a distance from informal networks in the community. Services and activities can take on an "institutional" flavor. This will be particularly true in ethnics of color communities that already may distrust existing organizations. And finally, an organizational approach can get mired in turf battles, as agencies quarrel over who should be doing what, and, fearing competition possibly withhold resource information from each other.

In most cases, a balance between the two types of networking seems to be optimal. Organizational linkages can be forged while personal contacts with informal networks are made. This two-pronged approach will strengthen the inter-organizational network while at the same time build credibility and acceptance at the grass roots level.

WHEN NETWORKING CAN BACKFIRE

Networking ideas always look good on paper. That is why many funding proposals for community-based prevention efforts include the creation of formal inter-organizational networks, usually in the form of task forces or committees, which will plan and implement joint prevention activities. Sometimes, however, these groups backfire and dissolve into unresolvable conflict.

The reason for this relates to the key functions of a network: reinforcing social roles, sharing information, and taking cooperative action. When you embark on creating a new network, it will be worthwhile to think through each of these three functions to determine whether that new network is likely to succeed. The following are questions to ask about the people and organizations you are about to bring together:

Reinforcing social roles: How similar are the values and beliefs of the people within the network with regard to the network's goals? If there is wide disparity among viewpoints, there may be little hope of compromise. For example, one prevention project pulled together a task force to address alcohol availability issues in a community. Included were a representative of a gasoline mini-mart chain and a member of MADD, whose organization had already begun efforts to ban concurrent sales of gasoline and alcohol in the community. These two people had completely opposing ideas on a subject, and the task force members quickly polarized around this issue. After several months of conflict, the task force recognized the impossibility of compromise and tried to turn its attention to other issues. But the protracted conflict had seriously undermined morale, and the task force fell apart.

In hindsight, task force organizers recognized that one of two things should have been done differently: Either the potentially unresolvable issue of banning concurrent sale of alcohol and gasoline should have been eliminated as a topic for the group to address, or one of the opposing viewpoints – in this case, probably the mini-mart representative – should not have been included as a member.

Channelling information: How willing are members of a network to share information with each other? If there is significant reluctance, the network will not work. Consider the example of one community's task force, composed of key people from a variety of organizations, who were asked to exchange information on their existing prevention activities and the resources which supported them. Some members, fearing encroachment by other organizations on their turf, declined to share much information. Others were concerned about increased competition for resources, and thus would not share information about funding sources or what community networks they had tapped into for support. This task force eventually dissolved, and was replaced by three smaller groups, each of which focused on a specific prevention activity which all the members of the group agreed upon.

In hindsight, prevention organizers recognized that they had made an impossible request of their task force: to put network priorities ahead of organizational priorities. Asking them to share information about resources was premature, and the subsequent reluctance undermined the network's ability to develop any cohesion.

Taking collective action: How willing are network members to take action together? One prevention program organized a Blue Ribbon Commission to create a community-wide coordinated prevention plan. Members of the committee were professionals from a variety of fields, all of whom had very strong ideas about what programs should be implemented. Because of these strong professional and turf issues, the group was unable to come up with a compromise plan.

In retrospect, the organizer of the commission recognized that once again, the members' respective organizational priorities were different from network priorities. Many members viewed membership on the commission as a way to advance their own agenda rather than create a joint agenda. This possibly was exacerbated by the fact that the commission was organized by the county, a primary funding source for all the commission members. Each member felt that his or her own organization's interests needed to be protected and advanced.

Thus, network organizers should be cautious of how compatible are the values and beliefs of potential network members, as well as how protective members might be of their organizational turf. Networks composed exclusively of representatives of organizations or professionals in the same field tend to experience these kinds of turf conflicts.

Finally, some organizers make the mistake of attempting to organize new networks when existing ones already perform the same basic purposes. For example, a prevention effort in a mixed rural/suburban community attempted to put together an interagency network to address prevention needs. A county-wide substance abuse prevention committee already existed to address these issues (although not to the satisfaction of the organizers). Because this committee existed, and because several members of the new network already participated in the other group, the new network fell apart after only a few months. .

INFORMAL NETWORKS: ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS

In some communities, organizers may have a choice about whether or not to emphasize networking with formal or informal networks. The purposes of the organizing effort will affect the choice, and the outcomes will be different, but either approach has the potential to yield success. However, in other instances, the choice clearly must be connecting first with informal networks. This is particularly true when networking within Native American communities.

A clear example of this is the case of a prevention program implemented in a rural county, targeting Native American youth. The original project design called for the development of a county-wide task force to develop a prevention plan for this population. Efforts to create this task force failed, and a new prevention worker -- a Native American who was a member of one of the local tribes -- was hired to revamp the program.

The new coordinator knew that in order to gain access and trust of the Native American people, certain cultural protocol had to be observed. He spent much of his time initially meeting with tribal elders and gaining their support of himself personally and of the project's goals and potential activities. He observed a key protocol by always offering something, such as food or some kind of practical assistance, whenever he met with an elder or asked for advice or assistance. He spent time with people in traditional activities such as fishing and hunting, and made himself available as an advocate to help members of families navigate the criminal justice, welfare or health care systems.

Only when he had spent several months in this kind of activity was he in a position to implement prevention-related activities, such as alcohol-free activities for youth. Ultimately, a task force was created within a specific school district to develop school-related prevention activities. This was done at the end of the two-year project period, not at the beginning. Trust and credibility had to be built first.

In another project focusing on Native American youth, the Caucasian coordinator has spent a number of years becoming familiar with the people and their culture. He regularly goes to the sweat lodge with local men to participate in this important Native American ritual; he attends many cultural activities such as dances, sings, pot-lucks, etc.; he incorporates food-sharing into all of his prevention activities; and he encourages the use of cultural symbols and activities as the basis for prevention events. In short, he has spent years gaining access to informal networks and building credibility among the Native American community he serves.

CONCLUSIONS

Networking is an indispensable part of implementing effective community-based prevention programs. It prepares the way for acceptance of prevention activity, enhances the likelihood that activities will be relevant to the community's needs, and creates ownership of prevention work among many different elements in the community. Effective networking with both informal and formal networks is crucial to long range prevention program success. Networking forges those connections which make effective prevention a reality.