

Notes from the Field
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West Virginia Partnership to Promote Community Well-Being

External Qualitative Research Team
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The focus of our data analysis this quarter is on the Strategic Prevention Framework-State Incentive Grant (SPF-SIG) Project Directors, trying to understand their experiences with and perceptions of the project. Our analysis is based on results from a mixed-method survey distributed to 41 current and past Project Directors who have worked with the SPF-SIG county-based initiatives during both the planning and implementation phases of the project (some only planning and others both planning and implementation). Some are still employed as SPF-SIG Project Directors and others have moved on to other positions. After the surveys were distributed, two reminder e-mail messages were sent to Project Directors in an attempt to increase their response rate. Thirteen (13) Project Directors (32%) responded to the survey – seven (7) are presently employed with a county-based SPF-SIG-funded project, five (5) were previously employed as SPF-SIG Project Directors in counties that no longer have SPF-SIG funding, and one (1) Project Director is employed with a previously funded SPF-SIG county that has continued its prevention efforts and in a county that currently receives SPF-SIG funding.

In addition, the analysis draws on data from interviews with 16 Project Directors – eight (8) from funded SPF-SIG counties, seven (7) from previously funded SPF-SIG counties, and one (1) working with both a funded and a previously funded county—all recommended by State Partnership members and/or PRC staff because they were perceived as facilitating high-level prevention efforts in their counties. The point of the purposeful sample used for the interviews was to identify lessons learned by examining a group of county-based programs perceived to be high functioning. The sample was not chosen in order to compare the funded and unfunded groups, but opportunities have been taken to make comparisons where it seemed appropriate in this report.

The surveys and interviews were aimed at getting a sense of how Project Directors viewed the SPF-SIG project. We asked Project Directors about the extent to which they believe that the SPF-SIG staff has been helpful, the extent to which they considered the Regional Learning Opportunities to be helpful, the extent to which they believe their voices are heard, and the extent to which they are satisfied with the way SPF-SIG decisions are made. Also, we asked Project Directors to identify and describe strengths or successes of the project, concerns about the project, and how SPF-SIG has influenced their county-based work.

We calculated means, medians, and modes for each of the five (5) quantitative items on the survey. We also calculated frequencies and percentages for two (2) yes-no questions on the survey. We purposefully did not conduct tests for statistical significance because the sample is too small; nonetheless we have confidence in the results because of the extent to which the interview and open-ended survey responses are consistent with each other and with the numerical data.

Scale used for Quantitative Question Responses by Project Directors

1	2	3	4	5
Never		sometimes		always
Not satisfied		moderately satisfied		very satisfied
Not helpful		moderately helpful		very helpful
Not useful		moderately useful		very useful
Little or no influence		moderate influence		strong influence

Satisfaction with Staff

To what extent has the staff at the Prevention Resource Center been helpful to you?

	Mean	Median	Mode
<i>Funded Counties</i>	4.6	5	5
<i>Unfunded Counties</i>	3	2.5	2
<i>All</i>	4.2	5	5

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not helpful and 5 being very helpful, the overall mean score for the entire group of Project Directors who completed the survey is 4.2 which indicates that Project Directors generally perceived PRC staff to be helpful (midway between moderately helpful and very helpful).

Mean scores for SPF-SIG funded counties indicate that Project Directors in those counties who responded to the survey perceived the PRC staff to be more helpful to them than did Project Directors from unfunded counties. The mean score of the funded counties was 4.6 which is in the range of very helpful. Most Project Directors in SPF-SIG funded counties who responded to the surveys spoke of the PRC staff – Dunbar-based and community-based – in positive terms like “meaningfully engaged with us,” “always available to us,” very helpful and very informative,” and “great resources.” Most funded Project Directors indicated an appreciation for the staff’s willingness to read drafts of their work, attend their local partnership meetings, respond to their concerns in a timely fashion, and generally make themselves available. In an interview, another Project Director from a SPF-SIG funded county shared that she “wouldn’t have been able to have done this without them [PRC staff] and I really have nothing bad to say about any of them. . . every time I e-mail, I get a response. . . people are super responsive and super helpful.” One Project Director from a funded county did say that she was disappointed by the level of assistance and knowledge that was offered by the PRC staff.

Project Directors in unfunded counties who completed the survey perceived the staff to be moderately helpful with a score of 3. Project Directors in these counties who responded to the survey expressed concerns about PRC staff—concerns that related to conflicting information, lack of follow through, poor management, and uneven levels of helpfulness by various staff members. One Project Director observed that there was tremendous variability among CDSs’ skill and experience. In interviews with Project Directors from unfunded counties, several of them expressed frustration, anger, and disappointment about confusion among PRC staff and their ability to share correct SPF-SIG information/knowledge in the counties. One spoke of a change in CDSs mid-stream and the less than positive impact that may have had on the success of their funding. The responses to this question, especially from unfunded counties, suggest that in counties with fewer human and

material resources, the quality of the PRC staff assistance may have been a critical factor in the extent to which these counties were successful in the SPF-SIG process.

It is important to note, though, that some unfunded county directors expressed praise and respect for the PRC staff. One unfunded Project Director characterized Dunbar-based staff as helpful and some CDSs as being more helpful than others. Another Project Director described her CDS as “invaluable . . . I can’t even put it in words. You know . . . it’s like the Master Card, it’s priceless.” Another said, “They [CDSs] try to help us out as much as they can and I can pretty much count on them . . . even though we’re not funded, they’re still a resource for us.”

Regional Learning Opportunities
How would you rate the usefulness of the Regional Learning Opportunities?

	Mean	Median	Mode
<i>Funded Counties</i>	4	4	4,5
<i>Unfunded Counties</i>	3.4	3	2,5
<i>All</i>	3.8	4	5

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not useful and 5 being very useful, the overall mean score for the entire group of Project Directors who completed the survey is 3.8 which indicates that Project Directors generally perceived the Regional Learning Opportunities to be midway between moderately useful and very useful. Both groups perceived the RLOs as better than moderately useful, but the funded group mean (4) was higher than the mean of the unfunded group (3.4). It is interesting to note that the mode (most often occurring score) for the unfunded counties was dichotomous in nature with equal numbers of Project Directors giving the RLOs a score of 2 (less than moderately useful) and 5 (very useful).

Networking and sharing information across counties were seen as the main benefits of the RLOs by Project Directors who completed this survey. Project Directors from both SPF-SIG funded and unfunded counties spoke over and over again about the value of “exchanging ideas,” “support from other counties,” collaborative efforts,” touching base with others,” and “sharing” as positive ways of moving their programs ahead. In an interview, one Project Director spoke of the “content” as well as “meeting with all those people” as being “super helpful.” Another said that “drawing from each other’s strengths and learning from their weaknesses” was “a good process.”

The RLOs also have their critics. One Project Director felt the RLOs were “not based on need” and were much more about “filling a schedule” and not much time was given to collaboration and networking – “since presentations are first and discussions second.” Another spoke of the geographic challenge of getting to the RLOs and another of the important time RLOs take away from her busy SIG implementation schedule.

Unfunded counties were invited to attend the Phase II RLOs and many have done so. One Project Director from an unfunded county spoke of the direct benefit she received from sharing curriculum and other resources with a neighboring funded county. But a downfall of the Phase II RLOs, that was mentioned more than once by Project Directors from unfunded counties, was the lack of funds (which had previously been available) to travel to the Phase II RLOS. One Project Director shared:

I was quite disappointed that the travel stipends for unfunded counties were discontinued. I feel that providing that resource was an excellent opportunity for the PRC to begin to mend the fence and heal some hard feelings that occurred when Phase II funding finally came

down. I think that one decision may have ruined a perfectly good opportunity to move more [in a] state-wide direction.

Decision Making
How satisfied are you with the way SPF-SIG decisions have been made?

	Mean	Median	Mode
<i>Funded Counties</i>	4	4	4
<i>Unfunded Counties</i>	2.1	2	2
<i>All</i>	3.2	4	4

Of the five quantitative questions included on the survey, this question about satisfaction related to SPF-SIG decision making ranked the lowest with an overall mean of 3.2 (moderately satisfied). The mean score for Project Directors in SPF-SIG funded counties was considerably higher at 4 than the mean score of 2.1 for those in unfunded counties.

The mean scores on the surveys indicate that Project Directors in funded counties who completed this survey were more satisfied with the SPF-SIG decision-making process than were Project Directors in non-funded counties who completed this survey. Corroborating this finding, the funded group described the SPF-SIG funding process in interviews as “people doing the best they can,” “decision making based on the knowledge they had at the moment,” and “never weighted towards a county that was . . . a greater county economically.” Of course, this group as a whole was pleased to receive SPF-SIG funding, but some Project Directors still raised concerns related to the funding decisions such as: “We heard that the state committee [State Partnership] made decisions, but we also heard that the PRC made decisions or was influential in the decision-making process” and, from another respondent:

We have done almost everything asked of us and have continued to be funded. However, the last implementation funding was far less than we asked for and the cuts were unexpected. It appears that the sub-granting work group changed its criteria or priorities without letting us know. Such decisions should have been accompanied by some explanation of the decision making process.

As might be expected, respondents who were Project Directors in unfunded counties were uniformly less satisfied with the SPF-SIG decision-making process. Their mean score of 2.1 lies between not satisfied and moderately satisfied. Again, the mode score is in alignment with the median score to suggest uniformity of central tendency. Survey responses and interviews associated with this group of Project Directors were peppered with the words “dissatisfied,” “frustrated,” “unfair,” “arbitrary,” and “preconceived” as they described their dissatisfaction with SPF-SIG decision making. One Project Director who has worked with both funded and unfunded counties shared:

Too often during the process it was obvious to participants that trial and error was playing a part in decision making. That was perceived negatively and caused ill will toward the [SPF-SIG] project.

Another Project Director from an unfunded county said in an interview that there were “major flaws in the selection process – some of the counties selected made a great deal of sense and others made no sense whatsoever. We were completely dissatisfied with this.”

Voice

To what extent do you think your voice has been heard in the SPF-SIG process?

	Mean	Median	Mode
<i>Funded Counties</i>	4.3	4	5
<i>Unfunded Counties</i>	2.6	2	2
<i>All</i>	3.5	3.5	5

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being never and 5 being always, the overall mean score of 3.5 on this item indicates that Project Directors who completed the survey perceive their voices were heard slightly more than sometimes. 'Voice' in this case indicates Project Directors' perception that they had a chance to add their opinions, thoughts, and feelings to the SPF-SIG process and that their input was heard and/or acknowledged.

Project Directors from SPF-SIG funded counties had a higher mean score of 4.3 that indicates they felt their voices were heard more than sometimes but less than always. One Project Director said, "We have participated in critical questioning all along," while others said, "I have never felt that my voice was not heard" and "everything I have ever expressed has been addressed in some way or another, even if it's 'there's nothing we can do about it'." Another Project Director shared:

There were no stupid questions in the eyes of the PRC or they're very good actors. And I personally thought that some peoples' questions were stupid. But they were treated as though they were the most important issue of the day. I love that about those people.

On the other hand, Project Directors in counties not currently funded by SPF-SIG were of the opinion that their voices were less heard in the SPF-SIG process. Their mean score of 2.6 indicates they perceived their voice to be heard slightly less than sometimes. Survey responses from Project Directors in unfunded counties included these comments: "I would say that there has been an agenda all along and that the PRC didn't really want any of us to ask questions," and "I know my voice has been heard, but I'm not sure it has been listened to." Interview responses from this group of Project Directors explained their perceptions more fully.

Hmm, they heard me; they didn't want to hear me. And they really chose not to acknowledge me . . . There were some issues where people were afraid to speak up and say what they were thinking. They thought there would be repercussions.

I think they [PRC and State Partnership] had their own agenda, a very specific agenda, and I felt like they surrounded themselves with a moat and didn't want to hear what people had to say . . .It was such an interesting lesson in contrast because everything they said was about community involvement – this is . . . whatever you want, what your community wants. But it wasn't what the community wanted; it was what their agenda was and what hoops they had to jump through.

It is interesting to note regarding the issue of voice within the SPF-SIG program, that Projector Directors' perceptions did not always align with whether or not they received funding. One Project Director from an unfunded county shared:

Oh, I think that my voice was heard and accepted and respected. I really do. Especially with the PRC and I know that the PRC's hands were tied . . . I know they could only do what they

were allowed to do, but I formed a great relationship with all of them. And I know that they heard. They listened and they heard and respected the things that I had to say. And I appreciate it – so very much . . . They continue to ask, to hear from me.

Community Influence of SPF-SIG
To what extent has the SPF-SIG process influenced how you and other agencies work in your county?

	Mean	Median	Mode
<i>Funded Counties</i>	4.5	4.5	5
<i>Unfunded Counties</i>	2.7	2	2
<i>All</i>	3.7	4	5

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being little or no influence and 5 being strong influence, a score of 3.7 indicates that Project Directors overall who responded to the survey perceived the SPF-SIG to have slightly greater than moderate influence on the way they and other agencies work in their counties. Project Directors in funded counties had an overall mean score of 4.5 on this question which indicates that they perceived that they and other agencies in their county had been influenced by the SPF-SIG somewhere in the range between moderately and strongly.

Survey comments among Project Directors from funded counties focused on SPF-SIG as a catalyst for bringing new people to the table to address prevention work. Comments included: “brought people and institutions around the table in an unprecedented manner. People have remarked that they haven’t seen this cross sector collaboration before,” “brought more people into the coalition and/or activities . . . substance abuse prevention is more highlighted.” Others commented about additional benefits of the SPF-SIG process they experienced. They described “using the SPF process for other grants” in their county and said that they saw value in the process. “I believe this will be very important in the history of our county as I believe it is giving us funding and time to further develop the positive development of our communities.” The data-driven focus of SPF-SIG also was mentioned: “The focus on using data to plan and using measurable outcomes have been used by me and others more and more in the last year. The SPF-SIG process has been an immeasurable tool in thinking this way.”

Projects Directors in the SPF-SIG unfunded counties had a mean of 2.7 which indicates that they believed their county work was slightly less than moderately influenced by the SPF-SIG process. On the survey, Project Directors in these unfunded counties expressed the value of having a logic model from which to work, the benefit of being able to focus on substance abuse prevention, and the belief that “the planning and collaboration that has come out of the process needs to be duplicated for other issues.” In several interviews with the Project Directors, though, they (especially ones associated with Family Resource Networks), perceived that the SPF-SIG had minimal influence on their coalition building. One Project Director commented: “I would say in general, because we’re community-based, and we try to get a wide variety of people involved, we didn’t really have any huge changes in the way we did things.” Another stated that any changes that occurred in the local coalition “didn’t particularly have anything to do with SPF-SIG.”

In examining the overall scores (funded and unfunded counties) for this question, note that even though the mode (most frequently occurring score) was 5, the mean score was 3.7. This indicates that there were several scores that were very low on this question which lowered the overall mean score; therefore, in a sense, the mean score of 3.7 under-represents the measure of influence the SPF-SIG process had on the communities included in this report.

Additional Funding

Has your county coalition applied for funding other than through SPF-SIG?

	Yes	%	No	%	No Response	%
<i>Funded counties</i>	2	25%	4	50%	2	25%
<i>Unfunded counties</i>	5	100%	0	0	0	0
<i>All</i>	7	54%	4	31%	2	15%

Overall, survey results indicate that 54% of the counties have applied for additional funding besides that provided by SPF-SIG. Only 25% of SPF-SIG funded counties included in this quarter's data have applied for funding outside of SPF-SIG. One Project Director in a SPF-SIG funded county who responded to the survey reported receiving a Safe and Drug Free Communities grant and an Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws (EUDL) grant but not being awarded a tobacco prevention mini-grant for which her group applied. Another reported receiving \$11,000 from a local community foundation. Others shared that they "have considerable in-kind funding for prevention projects," are teaching a grant writing class that will "produce completed grant proposals," and have formed a team to address the topic of additional funding. Another Project Director addressed the issue of time related to seeking additional funding:

Not enough time to apply for funding with so much effort needed for implementation, strategizing, and evaluation. Will need to decrease implementation efforts in . . . [the] future and increase sustainability funding efforts.

Project Directors who responded to the survey and were located in unfunded counties, report seeking non-SPF-SIG funding at a much higher rate than current SPF-SIG funded counties. Of the Project Directors who responded, all five (100%) reported seeking additional funding and four of them reported receiving some funding. They specifically mentioned Safe and Drug Free Communities, a local community foundation, a tobacco prevention grant, and an after school grant. One Project Director shared that her coalition has been in existence for 17 years and has "a variety of funding sources." Another reported that "the latest development is to try to become self sufficient through endowments/donations." He went on to say, "It's a long slow process that requires time and effort that cannot be used for prevention work."

Education Representation

Is someone from education involved in your county SPF-SIG coalition?

	Yes	%	No	%
<i>Funded counties</i>	7	100%	0	0
<i>Unfunded counties</i>	5	83%	1	17%
<i>All</i>	12	92%	1	8%

Overall, 92% of counties who responded to the survey report that they have education representation on their local prevention partnership. All Project Directors who completed this survey from SPF-SIG funded counties (100%) reported having education personnel involved in their local partnerships. They reported involvement by counselors, teachers, SADD advisors, superintendents, assistant superintendents, parochial school superintendents, principals, truancy officers, and nurses among others. Project Directors described involvement by these persons as variable from extremely involved, to participating in the design of the prevention efforts, to being involved whenever scheduling permits, to staying in touch through meeting minutes.

Student involvement was described by one funded-county Project Director as an important element of education involvement in his county.

The SADD students are, in effect, a youth council to the coalition, and we are thinking about formally recognizing them as such. They guide nearly every youth-related decision we make, and they had a great deal of impact on how our county comprehensive plan developed.

Counties not currently funded by SPF-SIG were less likely to have education personnel involved in their county prevention work – only 83% of Project Directors responding to this survey. They also reported a wide span of involvement by similar types of education-related personnel as was reported by the funded counties, but also reported the following three positions as involved: 21st Century Schools Coordinator, personnel director, and Title I Director. Again, they reported wide variability in types of involvement by education personnel - helping to develop comprehensive plan, playing a key role in implementing prevention-based curriculum, assisting with connection to student groups at the high school, helping with PRIDE survey, and providing insight and advice.

Strengths

What do you consider to be the main strengths of the SPF-SIG project in your county?

Project Directors with successful coalitions identified many strengths and successes of the SPF-SIG work in their counties. As has been mentioned many times before by other SPF-SIG participants (State Partners and PRC staff), several Project Directors during this quarter perceived the ability to learn through this project as a major strength. These comments came from Project Directors in SPF-SIG funded and unfunded counties. They described their experience with SPG-SIG in general terms as “learning a lot,” “a frustrating learning experience,” and “even the worst of it has been wonderful because it was a learning experience.”

Other than comments related to learning, three additional categories emerged from the Project Directors’ comments about perceived strengths of the SPF-SIG project. We have grouped the perceived strengths into three categories: (1) new and/or strengthened coalitions, (2) focus on community needs, and (3) broad focus on prevention.

New/Strengthened Coalitions

Based on the survey responses and interview comments from successful Project Directors in SPF-SIG funded and unfunded counties, it is evident that new coalitions were formed and pre-existing coalitions were strengthened because of SPF-SIG. Many Project Directors emphasized the importance of the local SPF-SIG coalition. One Project Director shared, “Our main strength IS our coalition.” Others perceived the strengths of their local coalitions as rooted in members’/groups’ characteristics they described as “helpful,” “supportive,” “active,” “caring,” and “strategic.” Several specifically mentioned the inclusion of youth in the local coalitions (in some cases for the first time ever) as very valuable to the process.

In addition to youth, several Project Directors, from both newly formed county coalitions and pre-existing ones, spoke of the importance of bringing a variety of new people to the table with the purpose of addressing prevention issues in the community.

The SPF-SIG planning grant prompted our small prevention partnership to gather additional community members including parents, youth, business leaders, clergy, law enforcement,

educators and other concerned citizens to address topics of substance abuse and prevention. We now have a strong community partnership that guides our efforts.

Focus on Local Community Needs

Throughout the survey responses from and interviews with Project Directors in SPF-SIG funded and unfunded counties, there was an overall sense that they valued SPF-SIG's data driven process and focus on localness. Logic models and county data were seen as important.

One Project Director from a SPF-SIG funded county spoke of the use of "logic . . . as the absolute strength" of the SPF-SIG model and she shared that the PRC's "logical way of looking at a complex problem" was a strength of the SPF-SIG. A Project Director from an unfunded county noted that it took almost a year for her to learn to write a logic model but it was "the most useful" thing for her. More specifically, several Project Directors from both funded and unfunded counties spoke of the data provided by the PRC as very useful to their community's understanding of local prevention issues and needs. One expressed appreciation for the county data he received which "we hadn't had or had access to before."

Another Project Director who represents a county not funded by SPF-SIG described her local partnership's focus on community needs and how she and her coalition were approaching that issue because of their involvement in SPF-SIG.

I think the main strength [of SPF-SIG] is that it's really trying to build on the needs in the community – trying to stay very, very attuned to the needs. We're trying to find the story behind the data and stay attuned to that - figuring out how to mobilize resources within the community to address those needs.

Another Project Director expressed appreciation for the valuing of place in the SPF-SIG process. She perceived that it was important that "each county fits its planning to its own county needs." She went on to say "that's brilliant. In a state like West Virginia you just have to do that."

Broad Focus on Prevention

Understanding and addressing prevention from a broader perspective is on the minds of many Project Directors as evidenced by their comments to us. One Project Director from an unfunded county described her county partnership's gradual understanding of prevention as a broader concept when she acknowledged that there are "a lot of connections there." She went on to say that she understands prevention to be connected to "child abuse, neglect, and things like that." Another Project Director from a funded county described her county's approach to substance abuse prevention as a "framework approach, rather than a single focus." She went on to explain substance abuse as "just one piece of a whole picture" . . . and we're determined to not have that be our only driving force, to focus on 'don't do drugs', that's not the point for us." A third Project Director, who was from a funded county, shared her delight that her County Commission was the fiscal agent for the SPF-SIG project because they have demonstrated "their willingness to accept this as a community issue." Her sense was that they viewed prevention as "not a family or a school issue . . . [but] a community responsibility."

Beyond understanding the *concept* of prevention itself in a broad way, Project Directors also saw value in thinking broadly about prevention *strategies*. One Project Director from a SPF-SIG funded county commented that her local coalition realized that "you have to get at this problem in a variety of ways, using a variety of methods in order to create overall sustainable change." Another Project

Director from a funded county described her coalition as “looking at long-term, broader solutions to substance abuse issues.” She went on to say:

For years people have thrown money at individual projects and programs . . . and then the money goes away and those projects and programs go away. This [SPF-SIG] is more, the way we’ve looked at it, how we plant the seeds of substance abuse prevention in the most simple way in the varied populations that we can think of – be it in the doctors, be it the pastors, schools counselors, and general community. That’s how our plan is laid out and how we’ve kind of marched through.

Concerns

What are your main concerns about your SPF-SIG project in your county?

Successful Project Directors from both SPF-SIG funded and unfunded counties expressed concerns about the SPF-SIG project in relation to four major areas: (1) funding decisions, (2) communication, (3) sustainability, and (4) prevention as a concept. Before addressing these issues individually, it is important to note that several Project Directors had a concern that seems to connect in some ways to the last three categories – a perception that prevention has low visibility in their counties. One Project Director described visibility of the county’s prevention work as one of his main concerns. Another Project director from a SPF-SIG funded county shared:

We certainly don’t have people asking for it [prevention programming] and that’s where I’d like to see us, at a point where this community is so ready for prevention that they are asking for programs. I feel like everyone should have heard of us and what we’re doing by now and they haven’t . . . I see two or three more years of trying to let people know we exist and what we stand for.

Funding Decisions

Many Project Directors (especially within the unfunded group) believe that SPF-SIG implementation funding should have been provided for all counties who participated in the initial planning phase of the project – perhaps at different levels, though. This concern was summed up by one Project Director who shared:

My main concern about the SPF-SIG project . . . is that a great deal of funds was given to a small percentage of counties. Our partnership feels that a more comprehensive state-wide approach that supports smaller communities at some level could be more effective and would have a greater impact on the problems facing people living in all communities.

Another Project Director thought that singling out some counties when all counties have substance abuse issues was a mistake. She commented “My suggestion would be if you’re going to have a program like this and you know you want to make a difference, then in the state of West Virginia it needs to be in every county.” Project Directors in unfunded counties were particularly sensitive to issues that concerned size, population density, and rural/urban differences among counties in this process. One shared, “If you’ve grown up in Charleston or wherever, you can’t understand what these small counties really face. . . I try to express the dilemma of these rural counties but I just don’t think they get it.” And other Project Director from an unfunded county represented the concerns of several Project Directors when she said that they were not treated fairly in the SPF-SIG funding process. “I didn’t feel like we were treated fairly . . . I felt like everything was arbitrary; the guidelines were very arbitrary . . . different counties got treated differently.”

Timing related to SPF-SIG funding decisions was another concern for several of the Project Directors from unfunded counties. A Project Director shared that the decision “whether to give implementation funds to my county was made either before or at the time of the submission of our first plan and there wasn’t anything we could do to make it better after that” and “it seemed like they already had in mind who they were going to fund in the future based on the statistics.” In line with that, another Project Director said, “I believe that before they started this process, they already knew who they were going to offer the money to because they had the data before they started the process, and they knew how they were going to analyze this data.”

Lack of feedback and/or final comments on their SPF-SIG proposals was mentioned as another concern by several Project Directors in unfunded counties. One commented, “I was never ever told at the end that I did not get the grant . . . no one from SPF-SIG told me. I didn’t get any e-mails. I found out by other counties . . . who had got it . . . I would like to have had feedback as to why I didn’t get the grant. . . . I would have appreciated that.” Another project Director said, “We didn’t get anything at all.” And a third shared, “I was frustrated . . . they just weren’t straightforward about this.”

In relation to hard feelings about the way funding decisions were made, one respondent suggested moving forward with a “more unified effort that keeps everyone working together. . . . Get the rest of the state back on board with the process—funded and unfunded.” Her vision was to “move ahead and work collaboratively not only with agencies and organizations within our county, but with neighboring counties as well.”

Communication

Project Directors in both funded and unfunded counties reported communication issues related to what they described as contradictory and confusing information. One Project Director from an unfunded county seemed to capture the perceptions of many of her colleagues in this group: “I felt this process may not have been explained initially in the way it panned out – [it was] more of a developmental process.” Several Project Directors acknowledged that the SPF-SIG process was a learning experience for everyone involved and that fact had a tremendous impact on how the project was carried out. In spite of that, many Project Directors from funded and unfunded counties expressed frustration and disappointment by what they perceived as mixed messages delivered at all levels. One commented, “We would hear one thing and do it and then I would hear ‘no, you shouldn’t do that’.”

Other Project Directors specifically related their sense of confused messages to the RLOs. Several felt there was a breakdown in communication between what they heard from the PRC Dunbar staff and what was conveyed to them by the PRC field-based staff. One Project director from an unfunded county shared:

Those staff people [CDSs] felt lots of times like they were in the dark about what was going on and also didn’t agree with what they were telling people to do. So you have the PRC [in Dunbar] saying one thing and the people in the field saying [something else].

Another concern about mixed messages was the perceived prescriptive nature of the SPF-SIG. A Project Director from a funded county commented that the PRC said that the SPF-SIG is based on “what your community wants, but it wasn’t what the community wanted, it was . . . [about] *their* agenda.”

An additional communication concern pertained to the role of regional liaisons to the state partnership. Some Project Directors reported little and/or irregular contact with their liaisons. One noted, “For many months information has not been requested [from me] for the state SPF-SIG meeting by [our regional] representative. To be honest, I have no idea what goes on at these [partnership] meetings.”

Sustainability

It is clear after speaking with SPF-SIG Project Directors that sustainability is a complex concept that means different things to different people. SPF-SIG Project Directors in funded counties have great concerns around sustainability of funding and asked questions like: “Where will the funding come from after the grant runs out?” and “Will the state partnership continue to support our plan?” Another Project Director said her main concern was “sustainability of efforts when SPF-SIG main funding expires in 2009.” Timing seeped into the way Project Directors viewed issues of sustainability. One Project Director addressed that issue when she said “Everything moves so slowly that by the time we actually lay the groundwork for some real prevention strategies, SPF-SIG may be over.”

Switching away from funding-related sustainability, one Project Director in a SPF-SIG funded county shared that his main sustainability concern was “developing future leadership [capacity] for the [local] partnership while another said that her “main concern is maintaining and deepening stakeholder involvement.” Another Project Director said that “lack of leadership continuity” has been the greatest challenge his county has experienced in this project. More specifically, continuity of leadership provided by the SPF-SIG Project Directors was mentioned numerous times as a concern. One Project Director described his position as “the glue that holds everything together” but expressed concerns about continuity because he was the third director since the SPF-SIG project started in his county. Another Project Director noted that he was the fourth person in his county to hold that position.

Prevention as a Concept

Prevention as a concept is “tough for people to get, it takes a while” suggested one Project Director from a SPF-SIG funded county. She was referring to a County Commissioner’s comment at a recent meeting – ‘Now I understand what you’re talking about, I get it.’” Another SPF-SIG funded Project Director referred to other initiatives in her county that she viewed as potentially part of a more comprehensive approach to prevention and commented that “we want to assist [others] with what they are doing . . . in hopes of making things easier in the future . . .[but] we “don’t want to put new burdens on [them].”

As mentioned earlier in the strengths section of this report, several SPF-SIG counties are trying to approach prevention planning in comprehensive, system-based ways. The challenge to that way of thinking and proceeding is helping folks (local partners and community members at large) understand prevention in a more holistic way – in a way that is perceived as bigger than just substance abuse and affecting not just individuals, but whole communities.

Concluding Thoughts

We are grateful to Project Directors for taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in our survey and interview process and to write and speak openly about their views. The data are thick with ideas and information about how Project Directors have experienced and perceived the SPF-SIG

work. In this report we have attempted to give a sense of some of the issues that emerged as salient to their understandings.

Collection and analysis of data (both quantitative and qualitative) this quarter were not initially designed to compare funded and unfunded counties. That being said, once the purposeful sample was chosen, we thought it would be a missed opportunity if we did not examine the responses of Project Directors as they related to these two different funding situations.

As might be expected, Project Directors within and across the two groups – SPF-SIG funded and unfunded counties – have a variety of perceptions about the SPF-SIG project and those differences often times align with their county's current status in the SPF-SIG funding scheme. Another factor to consider is that sometimes those who choose to respond to surveys, like the one we used to gather a portion of the data for this report, are those who are motivated to reply based on their very strong (positive or negative) perceptions.

It is interesting to note, though, that the question which asked Project Directors to describe their perceptions related to SPF-SIG decision making produced the largest discrepancy between the mean scores of the two groups (difference between means = 1.9). Producing a wide (but lesser) discrepancy were three other issues: helpfulness of PRC staff (difference between means = 1.6), respondents' voice being heard in the SPF-SIG process (difference between means = 1.7), and SPF-SIG influence on community work (difference between means = 1.8).

Also, note that the overall mean scores (funded and unfunded counties together) are lowest in response to the issue of SPF-SIG decision-making. This finding, coupled with the discrepancies between means mentioned above, indicates that even though the mean score for funded counties concerning SPF-SIG decision making was 4, the unfunded counties' scores were so low that they lowered the combined mean for both groups to 3.2. This suggests that these unfunded county directors feel very strongly that SPF-SIG decisions were not made fairly. As discussed above, interviews with Project Directors from successful funded and unfunded counties support this as well.