



*Notes on the Notes*  
**West Virginia Partnership for Community Well-Being**  
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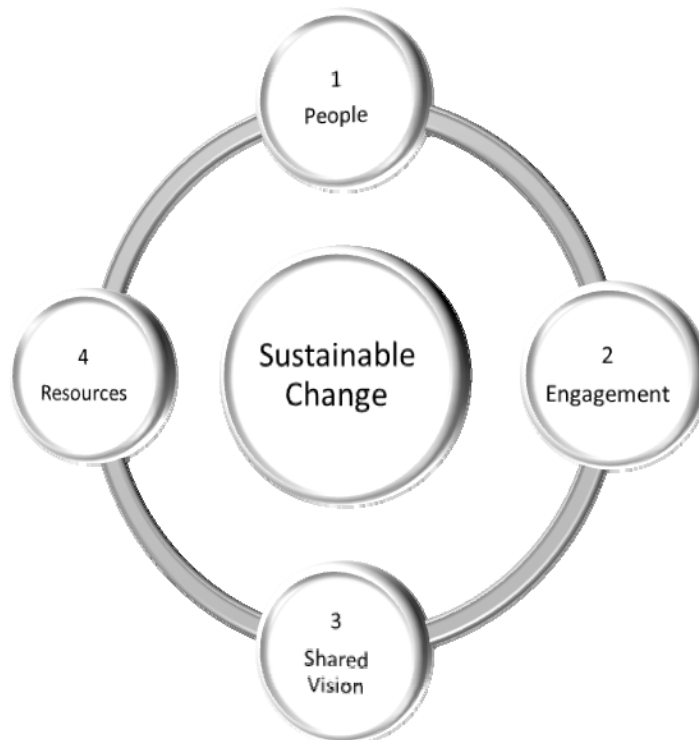
For this report, we studied the prior reports we have written (13 in all) over the past four years. We did a cross-case analysis of the reports that was illuminating, especially in understanding what kinds of things have changed—and in what ways—as well as what kinds of things have remained more constant over the course of the project to date. We tracked changes in our own research processes as well as in the project itself, as part of an effort to become clearer about what we have learned—and what we can learn—from our study to date. Hopefully the insights we have gained as a result of this analysis will make a valuable contribution to knowledge on collaborative community-based social change, especially with a prevention focus, and will be helpful to those who work directly in communities as well. This report features our preliminary analysis of the project itself; we will address changes in our own research processes in a later document.

In our longitudinal qualitative study we have used primarily participant-observation, individual ethnographic interviews, and analysis of written documents as data generation strategies. In the past year we also turned to mixed-methods (adding survey data) in an effort to include more people and activities in the research as the project expanded while the size of our team did not. On a quarterly basis, we conducted a preliminary inductive content analysis of data in order to provide feedback to West Virginia partners and other project participants such as Prevention Resource Center staff (PRC)—both Dunbar-based and Community Development Specialists, county Project Directors, and members of Community Prevention Partnerships.

We are developing a model (a grounded theory of sorts) of community collaboration for social change based on what we have learned from the SIG process to date. We will modify this initial, preliminary draft of the model as we continue to learn from the project. In order to have confidence in the validity of the model in describing and explaining what has been/is happening in the WV Partnership and SPF-SIG we need honest, ongoing feedback from participants including WV Partnership members, PRC staff (both Dunbar-based and field-based), and local community coalition participants including both paid staff (i.e., project directors), and volunteer participants (coalition members, staff). This feedback is important because other than in the initial partnership planning year, we have been spread very thin in our study of the project. The purpose of developing the model is to concisely and clearly portray what we have learned from our study of the project. Hopefully that portrayal will make a valuable contribution to knowledge on collaborative community-based social change, especially with a prevention focus, and will become a useful tool for those working directly in communities.

The model, with five components (people, engagement, vision, resources, and change), is tentatively titled: “Getting (it) Together: Collaborative Community Change.” It is

presented below in what may appear to be a sequence of four steps that lead to the fifth component/goal – change. While it may be useful to think of the model in such a linear way – with a series of steps to follow—our experiences with the project suggest that the components or tasks are not as linear as they may at first appear. For example, while the first component, getting the right people to the table, was a task tackled early in this collaborative work (i.e., even before the state partnership planning year), it is also an issue that has continued to be revisited on a regular basis; it is not a task that was done, checked off the list, and not addressed again. The open bullets in each section represent our expectations for additional items that will be generated by project participants who are kind enough to provide feedback on the model.



At the end of each section there is a list of strategies for accomplishing the particular task addressed in that part of the model (i.e., strategies for getting the right people to the table, getting them engaged, and so on). As is true with all other elements of the model, the strategies are based on our study of the project to date—in other words, what we have learned primarily from observing and talking with partners, staff, and other participants. Hopefully the strategies will be helpful to those trying to use the model to guide their own collaborative, community change work.

## *Getting (it) Together: Collaborative Community Change*

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### **1. PEOPLE: Get the “right people” to the table.**

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The “right people” include:

- Representatives of all stakeholder groups (to create a group that is broad, inclusive, and representative)
- People positioned in the “right places” in their organizations/communities (influential, stable, connected positions/roles, decision-makers)
- Individuals with commitments (they “get it”)
  - To community (sense of ownership, responsibility)
  - To collaboration
  - To civic engagement
  - To reflection, learning/growth
  - To evidence-based decision-making and planning
  - To taking a broad view
  - To community-based problem-solving
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- Skilled/knowledgeable/experienced people
  - In prevention or related field
  - In coalition and capacity-building
    - Finding people
    - Engaging people
    - Facilitating collaboration
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- Trusted (in their organizations, communities)
- A balance of personalities (with a mixture, for example, of visionaries and task-oriented types)
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This is an issue we recognized from early in our study of the project. We featured it in the *Eyes on the Process* paper about the WV Partnership planning year. Looking at the entire data set generated to date, it seems that getting and keeping the right people at the table is considerably easier on a smaller scale (i.e., in the WV Partnership) than statewide. West Virginia Partnership members were selected carefully with an eye toward what each individual would bring to the group and this care continues to be taken as partners are added to the group.

As the project rolled out in 53 counties across the state, broad, inclusive, representative local community coalition membership was desired as well and was built into local planning grant guidelines, but perhaps not with the kinds of additional specifics discussed above in terms of roles/positions, commitments, and knowledge/skill sets. Also, as the

project scaled up, this became a more difficult issue because of constraints on funding paid positions such as project directors and PRC staff.

We have seen that getting the right staff (e.g., PRC staff, county project directors) to the table is as important as getting the right partners and coalition members involved. Throughout the life of the project, staff has been viewed as a vital element of the project's progress at both the state level and within local communities. The unevenness of coalition effectiveness throughout the state seems to be related to variations in skills, knowledge, experience, and commitments among staff members, as well as among unpaid local coalition members.

Strategies:

- Use already-existing relationships to explore possibilities for locating individuals who meet the qualifications listed above.
- Be as specific and clear as possible about what kinds of people should be at the table and explicitly give that information to others you hope will use it (e.g., project directors, local community coalitions).
- Do not underestimate the importance of attracting and keeping the “right people” in paid staff positions.
- Make sure the right people are at the table in a timely fashion—ideally as soon as it becomes obvious that they will be involved in some way. (the importance of timing)
- Continue to modify membership (who is at the table) as circumstances change.
- Put strategies in place to continue to recruit and retain new members since inevitably people will leave, retire, or otherwise relinquish their membership
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## **2. ENGAGEMENT: Get them engaged—with each other and with the project.**

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Engagement includes:

- Quantity and continuity of participation (Who speaks, volunteers, does tasks and how often and for how long)
- Quality (nature) of participation (How they are engaged)
  - Meaningful/authentic vs. going through motions/contrived
  - Collaborative/democratic vs. individualistic/authoritarian
  - Voice/visibility vs. Unseen/heard (behind the scenes)
  - Ownership/responsibility vs. peripheral/disconnected engagement
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In the state partnership planning year we tracked this issue just within that relatively small group, noticing that engagement grew in terms of both the numbers of people participating and the instances of their participation (quantity). As the project evolved in subsequent years, we also noted growth in the *quality* of engagement with more state partners taking on larger and more meaningful responsibilities in the group, however both the quantity and quality of engagement continues to be somewhat uneven with some state partners involved considerably more often and more deeply than others. We also noted the increased democratic nature of participation with each other, especially as guided by the PRC, by the elected partnership chairperson, and by a core of highly engaged members. These democratic processes were taken seriously and built into the by-laws of the group.

By the third year of the project, we learned that as state partner engagement increased so did perceived learning and satisfaction with the project. It seemed that as individuals became more actively involved and invested in the work, the more it affected them, both cognitively (learning) and emotionally (felt satisfaction). This is consistent with considerable research on teaching and learning showing that educational environments in which people are actively and meaningfully engaged with the content are the ones more likely – than traditional, teacher-centered environments—to result in substantial learning gains.

As the project scaled up, going statewide in 53 planning counties and ultimately 17 implementation counties, engagement continued to be an important issue, though a more difficult one for us to track. We can say with some degree of certainty, though, that local community participants in the first year of Regional Learning Opportunities (RLOs) appreciated opportunities to engage with others in their counties and regions and beyond. Networking was seen as a major benefit of that experience. They also appreciated the project’s focus on the local community, allowing them opportunities for more meaningful, authentic engagement as they focused on assessing and then developing plans to address actual local community needs and problems.

Also, in terms of staff participants, one of the lessons learned from the study of year-one RLOs is that Community Development Specialists’ (CDSs) engagement with the planning and design of the sessions was positively related to the effectiveness of the sessions. The CDSs were not at the table when the initial visioning of the RLOs as a non-traditional, adult learning experience took place and for the most part they were only minimally engaged in planning and designing the actual RLO sessions. That separation—between the planning and the implementation of the sessions—proved to be a constraint in implementing the program as envisioned.

Strategies: The main idea here is to give purposeful, explicit attention to increasing both the quantity and the quality of participant engagement in the work.

- Facilitate discussion in efficient but democratic ways.
- Involve members in small groups, work groups, and committees.
- Use democratic meeting procedures (e.g., Robert’s Rules).

- Require engagement (e.g., meeting attendance).
- Make meetings and meeting environments warm, inviting, pleasant/fun.
  - Room arrangements that encourage conversation (face to face if possible)
  - Name cards
  - Acronym police
  - Parking lots
  - Serving food such as lunch or snacks
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- Build in opportunities for formal and informal networking.
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**3. VISION: Facilitate their development of a shared vision (mission, purpose, goals) and plans to achieve it.**

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– a shared understanding of the purpose of the group/work – taking the time to develop in an ongoing way (the task is never finished), figuring out *what* the group believes and wants to work toward and *how* it wants to work toward those ends

- Evolving vision (allow to grow organically and change in response to new knowledge)
- Clarity on vision within the group
- Consensus on, and commitment to, vision within the group
- Based on evidence
- Communicated clearly to others
- Exploration of different viewpoints/understandings

This has been a difficult task, beginning in the state partnership planning year and continuing as the project went statewide. With collaborative structures and processes in place, reaching mutual understandings and making plans accordingly takes considerably more time than using more traditional, bureaucratic approaches. There is evidence that collaborative goal-setting and planning has become easier now than in the past for the state partnership. In the local communities, an initial expectation was that they would develop their own local visions and plans; the state partnership purposefully refrained from establishing state priorities for the county implementation grants. Despite that effort, some in local communities did not experience the process that way, feeling instead that in order to be eligible for funding they had to tailor their visions and plans to satisfy requirements imposed by the state partnership.

Strategies:

- Give explicit attention and time to constructing and reconstructing visions/goals.
- Explore (rather than stifle) different viewpoints.
- Obtain evidence to study and use in developing vision.
- Articulate clearly to each other and to others.

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#### 4. RESOURCES: Obtain resources necessary to support the vision.

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- Salaries for staff
- Time for staff to complete tasks
- Core operating expenses
  - Equipment
  - Travel money
  - Food allowances
  - Materials
  - - Printing
    - Distribution
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- Time/support to enable involvement of unpaid participants (e.g., partners)
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Resources are needed to support this kind of collaborative work, especially funds for staff salaries and to provide what is needed for people to meet and work together—travel expenses, food, materials, equipment, and so on. It seems clear that this project would not have taken place in the way it has without substantial financial support that came first from the grant that supported the WV Partnership planning year and subsequently, the SPF-SIG that supported the statewide county planning grants and finally the 12, then 17 local county implementation grants. The financial support was instrumental in developing and maintaining infrastructures for engaging in collaborative social change in both the state partnership and in local (county) prevention partnerships. Even with financial support, PRC staff members have been stretched thin at times as have some local project directors.

By definition, financial resources have been key to the work of this grant-based project throughout. However, the fact that some *unfunded* county coalitions are continuing to engage in collaborative community change efforts suggests that while financial support may be necessary for start-up and planning, it may not be necessary for subsequent collaborative work. On the other hand, there is evidence that loss of financial support from the SIG has placed limitations on the work of ongoing, unfunded counties. In some cases, financial support that was provided by the SPF-SIG initially was provided by other sources after the planning grant period ended. In at least one case, funding (not from SPF-SIG) is thought to have thwarted a community coalition's progress.

Strategies:

- Persistently seek funds from federal, regional, state, and local sources.
- Use logic model approach in seeking funding.
- Begin exploring possibilities for sustaining project early in the process.
- Consider both short and long-term funding needs.
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The four components (above) have generated what appears to be sustainable change at both individual and collective levels—the final component in the model. In the beginning, the PRC brought some of its own staff and perhaps other key individuals as well (the “*right people*”) *to the table* and they *engaged with each other* to pursue the idea of a comprehensive statewide prevention system for West Virginia. Once they had some level of *consensus on that vision/goal*, they sought *funding to make it happen*. That funding, in the form of the state partnership planning grant, supported the formation and growth of a new, statewide coalition of individuals (the WV Partnership) which represents *sustainable change*. That funding also was the basis for starting the cycle anew - with finding the right people for the state partnership, getting them engaged, formulating and agreeing on vision/goals, and seeking resources (SPF-SIG) to make it happen.

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## **5. CHANGE: Achieve sustainable change individually and collectively.**

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- Learning (relatively permanent changes in individuals’ thinking)
  - About substance abuse prevention (best practices, etc)
  - About evidence-based practice
  - About collaboration
  - About grants and grant-writing
  - About community-based change
  - About teaching and learning (technical assistance)
  - About their community
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- Social change (relatively permanent changes at community/collective level)
  - New or stronger coalitions
  - New or stronger community initiatives
  - New funding/grants
  - New connections (within and across organizations and communities)
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Throughout the past four years we have heard again and again, especially from individuals actively engaged in the project, about how much they have learned as a result of their experiences with this work. As noted above, it seems that particularly for those who have been actively and deeply engaged in the project, the result has been considerable learning. Participants have learned about particular issues such as substance abuse prevention, needs assessment, and evaluation as well as about capacity-building processes such as those featured in this model of collaborative community change. Participants have learned a great deal about their own communities. The learning is evident within members of the state partnership as well as among those in local communities throughout the state—among paid staff as well as partners and coalition

members—in funded as well as unfunded counties. In some cases, the learning has been through mistakes and has not always been an even, easy, or pleasant experience.

While learning is generally thought to occur at an individual level, there is evidence that this project has resulted in considerable collective growth or social change at the community level as well. As mentioned above, at the state level, there is a new organization—the WV Partnership—as a result of the project. The partnership, a sustainable infrastructure for developing and maintaining a statewide, comprehensive substance abuse prevention system, represents collective change. Also, numerous local community prevention coalitions have been initiated and/or strengthened as a result of the project.

Because the project has always placed considerable emphasis on process, perhaps even more than on products, the learning and change that has resulted may be seen as a valuable end in and of itself. A learning, growing process is one that can be used again and again as people come together to study and respond to perceived community needs.

Strategies:

- Make learning/growth (both individual and collective/community) an explicit, expressed goal.
- Build in formal and informal opportunities for learning (e.g., the RLOs).
- Use evidence-based teaching and learning strategies.
- Build in opportunities for people to put their learning into practice, to apply it.
- Acknowledge and reflect on successes as well as setbacks (learning from mistakes as well as achievements).
- Change plans as needed in response to feedback (e.g., from participants, evaluators).
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As we noted in the introductory comments, we are hopeful that you and other participants will enable us to increase our confidence in the internal validity of the model by giving us frank feedback about both its substance and format. Also, we are hopeful about the potential usefulness of the model. For example, perhaps a revised version could be part of the WV Partnership's efforts to assist counties or even communities within counties in their own collaborative social change work.

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<sup>i</sup> We are grateful to Anne Swedberg for her careful reading and insightful responses to an earlier draft of this model.