

## The 2008 SPF SIG Implementation Year

### Learning, Revision, and Flexibility

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**Submitted by Anne Swedberg, Ph.D.**  
Qualitative Evaluation Specialist  
WV Prevention Resource Center

*"I feel like the overall, the confusion that we thought about SPF SIG in the beginning, I feel like it's settling down and we're all kind of getting in our groove."*  
--Spoken by a 2008 SPF SIG Project Director

As a qualitative researcher for the West Virginia Prevention Resource Center (WV PRC), I gathered the data for this report between December, 2007 and January, 2009. The focus of this report is the ongoing *process* of implementing the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (SPF SIG) in the state of West Virginia at the community level. I use the word "process" intentionally; as administered in the state of West Virginia, the SPF SIG has enabled a process that has included learning and community development as integral components of the state's substance abuse prevention efforts. My research spotlights the 17 County Prevention Partnerships (CPPs) that have continued to advance their strategic prevention plans throughout the calendar year 2008.

The 2008 year was one of ongoing learning, revision, transition, and flexibility for the 17 West Virginia counties involved in implementing the SPF SIG: "learning" because the SPF SIG process has continued to engage all participants in learning since its inception; "revision" in the sense that local community prevention partnerships (CPPs) had the opportunity to revise their strategic plans as the year progressed, often in response to learning; and "flexibility" because CPPs have had the resources to respond to changes in their planning and/or local circumstances. As one project director said, "We have been fortunate to be able to make changes [in our strategic plan]. That is a direct result of dealing with strategic planning versus programmatic stuff." This project director's comment also reflects the shift towards strategic planning and coordination of resources—a more comprehensive and systemic approach to prevention, in other words—that is occurring within the state as a result of the SPF SIG.

In preparing this report I conducted semi-structured interviews (telephone and face-to-face) with project directors and staff from 12 of the 17 CPPs. I observed CPP coalition meetings, visiting several counties on multiple occasions; sat in on Regional Learning Opportunities (RLOs) in three of the state's four regions; participated in monthly WV PRC staff meetings about the SPF SIG; and attended quarterly Implementation Grant Meetings for the 17 sub-recipients. In total, I observed at least 54 meetings for the purposes of this report, although information that I

garnered from attendance at other related meetings/events also contributed to the overall knowledge that informed this document.

Several of the CPPs in this study developed out of local coalitions that existed before the SPF SIG funding came into the state. One such example is Logan County's P.I.E.C.E.S. coalition, "Prevention is Everyone's Concern Especially Schools," a body that formed as a result of local awareness and concern over the high level of substance abuse in this southern coal-mining region of the state. When P.I.E.C.E.S. applied for SPF SIG funding, project director Stephanie Birchfield noted in her application that the coalition already had been in existence for four years ( p.8 [http://www.pieceswv.org/Portals/13/LOGAN\\_COUNTY%5B1%5D%20Narrative.pdf](http://www.pieceswv.org/Portals/13/LOGAN_COUNTY%5B1%5D%20Narrative.pdf)). Other coalitions, for example the Cabell County Substance Abuse Prevention Partnership (CCSAPP), emerged as brand-new entities during the preliminary year of learning and planning in 2006-07. CCSAPP, which is located in the city of Huntington—a relatively large community by West Virginia standards—has benefited from a productive relationship with its well-established fiscal agent, United Way of the River Cities. One of the findings of this 2008 report is that CPPs formed before SPF SIG funds came into the state—or in other cases, CPPs allied with respected and existing structures afforded by entities like the Family Resource Networks (FRNs)—experienced these structures as an enabling factor in their growth and development.

Throughout the 2006-07 planning year, SPF SIG funds supported CPPs in 53 of the state's 55 counties as project directors learned to use data and research to develop strategic prevention plans uniquely geared to their own communities' needs. Finding and using accurate data has remained a concern for many of the CPPs, particularly in the extremely rural counties. As the project director of one such county observed, "One of our biggest challenges has been the collection of data. We don't really have data people in [our county]. Nobody at the level that we need." At the same time, as the SPF SIG continues to be implemented in West Virginia, the state has been building its epidemiological work group and slowly growing its capacity to respond to these types of concerns.

In March of 2007, 12 of the 53 CPPs that participated in the planning year were sub-granted the funds to implement their strategic plans: Barbour, Cabell, Kanawha, Lincoln, Logan, Marshall, Mingo, Morgan, Ohio, Pocahontas, Randolph, and Wood counties. An additional five counties became sub-recipients of SPF SIG funding in October of 2007 after extending their planning process and reworking their original plans: Calhoun, Doddridge, Fayette, Mercer, and Raleigh counties. These 17 counties include some of the state's most and least densely populated communities. They include counties from the state's northern panhandle, eastern panhandle, and southern coalfields as well as counties containing the state's largest urban centers and those counties with no claims to urbanity at all (Pocahontas County has a population density of 9 people per square mile). The efforts of the 17 CPPs have become part of the state's effort to fundamentally shift the culture where substance abuse is concerned—to effect long-term, state-wide, cultural change through collaborative relationships and coordination of knowledge, resources, and efforts at all levels.

Meanwhile, also during the 2008 calendar year, the advisory body that guides the SPF SIG at the state level, West Virginia's Partnership to Promote Community Well-Being, continued its growth as well. (From now on I will refer to this body as "the Partnership" with a capital "P"). As explained in a March, 2009 letter from the Partnership's Chairperson, Mike Lacy, the Partnership is "an alliance of existing state level agencies, organizations, local representatives, and experts in the substance abuse field whose common purpose is to guide the state's fight against substance abuse." Or, as Jamie Albert from the WV PRC describes it, the Partnership is

“more of an activity or a process than an entity ... an organization but not an agency ... a gathering of key agency and organizational representatives ... a forum for agencies and organizations to plan and work together in addressing substance abuse” (email). Participation on the Partnership is voluntary. By sitting down at the same table on a regular basis, participants are able to work towards breaking down the “silos” that exist between their various agencies and organizations and better coordinate state efforts and resources. Formation of the Partnership pre-dated the emergence of the local CPPs by approximately two years. The early evolution of the CPPs appeared to mirror the evolution of the WV Partnership. However, where the Partnership has developed into a voting, decision-making, advisory board that is staffed and supported by employees of the West Virginia Prevention Resource Center (WV PRC), as of 2008 the CPPs had yet to make a similar transition.

Created as a requirement of the state’s first SIG planning grant in 2004, the Partnership drew its membership from an array of state agencies and related state-level organizations, as well as representation from the faith community, youth, and community at large. The Partnership makes recommendations to the Governor’s office regarding the sub-granting of SPF SIG funds to the 17 CPPs and thus also ensures that the CPPs carry out the requirements of the SPF SIG within the guidelines established by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). Two of the Partnership’s ten guiding principles include the statements that “local people solve local problems best” and that “people support what they help create” while engaging with evidence-based practices and policies.

As mentioned previously, the Partnership’s early development—like the SPF SIG itself—emphasized process over outcomes. In turn, this emphasis on process fostered collaborative relationships within the membership of the Partnership. Additional information about the Partnership’s early growth can be found in “Eyes on the Process,” a paper written by a team of external qualitative researchers under the leadership of Dr. Linda Spatig. While the Partnership is not the subject of my report, its functioning is linked to the effectiveness of the work of the CPPs as well as state-level prevention planning as a whole. As a result, the relationship between the Partnership and the CPPs is vital to the success of the SPF SIG and cannot be overlooked.

Finally, a third component in West Virginia’s development of a comprehensive, coordinated, state-level prevention strategy (with the CPPs and the Partnership representing two other components) is the West Virginia Prevention Resource Center (WV PRC), a public-private entity that celebrated its tenth birthday in 2008. On behalf of the Governor’s office, staff at the WV PRC successfully applied for the SIG planning funds that fueled the state’s preliminary planning process (2004-2005), including formation of the Partnership. Throughout 2008, the WV PRC continued to serve as staff to the Partnership and to provide the kind of infrastructure and support that studies such as the *Blueprint for the States* identify as essential to a state’s prevention efforts.

The WV PRC is comprised of administrative, research, and support staff as well as a 16-person network of Community Development Specialists (CDS). The CDS (pronounced “sids”) are trained prevention specialists who operate in teams of four people in each of the four geographic quadrants of the state—the four regions designated by West Virginia’s Department of Health and Human Resources. With its central office located in the town of Dunbar, just outside the capitol city of Charleston, and with its field staff living in or close to the counties they serve, the WV PRC is uniquely positioned to deliver a broad range of support to both the Partnership at the state level and CPPs and communities at the local level. Throughout the

2008 calendar year, WV PRC staff served as an essential point of connection between all of the various players in the SPF SIG initiative. Furthermore, the WV PRC has been key in supporting and developing a state-level epidemiological work group and data base supplying the kind of information that is critical to planning and decision-making.

Because of the close relationship between the WV PRC and the Partnership, at times the project directors and members of the local CPPs have had difficulty distinguishing between the functions of the two. When CPPs have questions and concerns about their grants, they contact staff from the WV PRC. Thus, the WV PRC provides a face and a voice for the administrative decisions that govern the SPF SIG at the county level. In most cases, by contrast, the CPPs have had limited or no interaction with the membership of the state-level Partnership. As a result, the fact that ultimate decision-making power for the SPF SIG resides in the office of the Governor, or that the Partnership serves in an advisory capacity to the Governor's office and thus is charged with making funding recommendations, is unclear to most CPPs. Many of the CPPs continue to see the WV PRC and the Partnership as one and the same thing and therefore (for example, in their meetings) refer to the WV PRC as the governing body for the SPF SIG. In an effort to increase the level of interaction between the Partnership and the CPPs, in 2008 the Partnership invited a CPP representative from each of the four regions to serve as non-voting members and to attend quarterly meetings.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the data collected from CPPs and their project directors in 2008 falls into two broad categories: 1) aspects of the SPF SIG implementation that challenged CPPs and their staffs to learn new strategies, explore new opportunities, and/or revise existing planning and approaches; and 2) elements that enabled the work of the CPPs.

### **Challenges/Opportunities**

- **Early Focus on Education and Youth**

As I reviewed interview transcripts for this current (2008) report, I noticed a preponderance of conversation about activities, education, and programming that focused on offering opportunities to youth. At the same time, there was a significant absence of conversation about involvement with other types of strategies such as environmental strategies. This was a trend that I could trace back through data gathered in 2007 as well. In a report I prepared for three "Mid Point Plan Review" meetings held in March, 2008, I noted:

*The initial impetus of many county prevention efforts appears to target youth, especially building youth assets and offering youth prevention education—all of which provides the foundation of a strong plan and is consistent with the community's strategic planning—but is geared primarily towards individuals. At this point in time, there appears to be limited emphasis on broader environmental strategies, which remain another part of comprehensive planning.*

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<sup>1</sup> In 2008, the four "regional representatives" from the CPPs included project directors from Marshall (Latrisha Whitelach) and Cabell County (Anne McGee) and a coalition member from Raleigh County (Lois Manns). All three of these CPPs were recipients of SPF SIG implementation funds. The fourth representative, April Miller, was the CPP project director from Tucker County, one of the counties that had participated in the state-wide planning year but was not a recipient of SPF SIG implementation funds.

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At the time I was preparing my report for the Mid Point Plan Review, I was reading an article entitled “Cultivating Capacity: Outcomes of a Statewide Support System for Prevention Coalitions.” The article mentioned one of the reasons that coalitions may have difficulty achieving community-wide change is a “tendency to gravitate towards strategies targeted at individuals rather than those targeted at institutional level policies and practices” (69). Such a tendency “towards strategies targeted at individuals” appeared frequently among the SPF SIG-funded CPPs in 2008.

In 2008, all 17 of the SPF SIG counties shared goals that were connected to educating and engaging youth in prevention-related activities. Some of these activities participated in a tradition that, while not evidence-based, sought to keep youth safe or off the streets; other activities turned out to be part of a larger environmental strategy. As counties struggled to, in effect, break with tradition—for example, as project directors learned about population-level change and environmental strategies—county prevention plans reflected this shifting and developing understanding. Some counties selected to implement an evidence-based curriculum in the schools, such as Too Good for Drugs and Violence; others brought a speaker on prevention like Milton Creagh to address students and parents in the school system; some engaged in targeting alcohol outlets with activities like TIPS trainings, Sticker Shock, shoulder taps, or other environmental strategies offered through Youth in Action; several helped to sponsor post-prom lock-ins or other prom-related prevention efforts.

What follows is a sampling of comments that project directors made about their youth-related efforts:

*We started the PRIDE team the year before last and that has been, it's been the kick-off into the school for substance abuse prevention. These are good, solid kids in the community and I was just amazed at how well spoken they were. You could give them a topic and they could go before 10 kids or 200 kids and adults ... I was just amazed at how well spoken those kids were and what a difference it made in our school about bringing substance abuse to the forefront.”*

*The very first thing that happened was the Too Good for Drugs program was purchased and planned and we will roll it out next year. ... Another project that has come about is Teen Court and that's already moving, it's going to be implemented soon. ... [Three counties] ... are partnering, because those three counties are served by the same judge. And he came on board months ago.*

*We just finished at [the elementary and middle schools], we called it the pre-Teen Issue Day. We had four classes going on and we rotated. We did one on teen violence, one on alcohol, one on tobacco, and then one ... [on] prescription drugs and inhalants ... and ... healthy relationships ... there were like 8 different sessions. So it took a little bit more planning and then there was the rotation where the kids picked their top 3 choices and then they got to rotate between those. That was a really big success ... We surveyed the kids, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, so they picked all the topics that were presented that day. And then once we scheduled those, then they got to pick the top 3 that they wanted to go to. And a lot of those things you can't measure ... but I was actually at a meeting like a week or so after that ... [the local] FRN director was in the meeting and her son was a participant at the Teen Issues day and she said that's all he came home and talked about ... And she had the opportunity, once he came home, to talk about it*

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and to expand on the issues or the topics he had attended. So she spoke very highly of that whole day.

We have our alternate activities which include the traveling youth centers. They're doing well, we have four of those in the county ... That's our biggest way really to reach people as far as getting them to come to us. Unless we just go to some other event. And then of course, the drop-off center, that's one of alternate activities ... attendance is up over 120%. Now there, the materials are available, but mainly it's just a drug free place for the kids to come to. ... And then we have prevention education which is our big push. ... We're doing lots of programs. We're doing Too Good for Drugs, we're doing Safe Dates Safe Club .. We're doing Parenting Wisely ... we have a nice connection with that.

We know what to do with the Prevention Resource Officers, we know where to start, and to start really early in the year. So I think by next year we should be able to get two officers in the schools, at least ... It's really a learning curve ... you have to build on it ...and try not to go insane in the meantime.

We found that it's easier to work with individual schools than it is to work with the board of education to do an umbrella program. The board, it's really hard to get in there. We did the power point presentation, we've presented to the board of education two or three times ... getting in on that individual school level, I think that's important. We found that the counselors and the principals are willing to help us, you know, let us use their resources and to have us come in and do it—they're just glad to have the services available. ... [One of the elementary schools] now wants us to come in and do programming for six Fridays, I think—Too Good for Drugs and Violence.

These young kids ... brought together from different parts of the county ... [it's shocking] how much drugs have impacted their world ... when [our staff] would ask questions ... how informed these kids already were ... 2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> [grade] ... I think the majority of the kids we had here were high risk ... the kids that come from the projects, there'd be a whole groups of kids from the projects ... [and] a whole group of foster kids that came ... we just stood back and said, "Oh my gosh, they know all about this" ... Right off the top I can tell you three kids who came, if it wasn't their mom it was their dad who is in jail right now for dealing drugs or they just got out ... [we] went door to door in the projects, we couldn't get them to come to us so we went to them ... They weren't coming down to the place they were supposed to be to sign up so I was like, "Let's go up there." So we go up there and start knocking on doors and "Do you know where any kids live here?" That's how we got a bunch of kids ... If one signed up they were like, "Well, so-and-so" [lives nearby] ... One old man was like, "I think there's a kid up there on the hill!" ... we got probably ten right off the bat. They lived right on top of the hill, all you had to do was walk 50 steps ... Two of the kids, mom wouldn't even get up to get 'em ready but the kids were so excited they'd get themselves up. They'll walk to where they're supposed to go. The kids are the responsible ones.

I've been on task force groups before and [change] never really happened, but these [task force groups that are part of the CPP] are actually making things happen. They're revamping the mentoring program in the schools for the one. The others they're coming up with positive events for kids and the others working to bring in teen court and do some other things and they're actually making things happen, so I was so impressed with that and I felt like it was just a very exciting time to be working with the partnership

... They're buying in and taking ownership in it and it's just an exciting time to get involved and I think it really just has so much potential to have a positive impact on our kids and community. I like that it's coming from the community not just the schools or not just one organization involved but it's the whole community working together to try and take care of our kids as well and build a better community for the future.

Interestingly, despite the number of strategies and activities targeting youth, project directors continued to mention the fact that they had trouble bringing youth onto the boards of their local CPPs:

*Well, we've struggled with that ... for ... maybe a year, a year and a half, we had pretty good participation, we had some students that were youth representatives. The issue was always they're missing school because we have the meetings during the day and we struggled with trying to have the meetings in the evenings when students can come but they're so many activities that the students are involved in they wouldn't necessarily be able to come anyhow ... we had one [high school student] serve as a representative and they're on our email list. We don't want to strictly rely on that, but they're on our coalition, they just don't come physically to the meetings. But that's probably always going to be an issue because of the timing. I mean we have the meetings at lunch [and] that satisfies most of our other membership. They can come during lunch, they can come away from work, but the only other option really is having it in the evening and I think we would see our numbers dwindle significantly if we did that.*

*Concerns overall with the whole SPF SIG project is that we still don't have our youth involved like we want to. That is my biggest concern. I'm hoping since we're bringing in an Outreach Coordinator they can try to pull in the youth for us. We're just not there yet. That's the one main concern that I have.*

Youth—educating youth, restricting youth access, engaging youth on community-level partnerships—remained an important target and a concern of all the SPF SIG counties in 2008.

- **Developing a Shared Understanding of Environmental Strategies**

In the first quarter of 2008, when grants management staff at the WV PRC reviewed the reports generated by the fledgling CPPs, it appeared that most counties were struggling to fully grasp the concept of environmental strategies. Simultaneously, CSAP and SAMHSA increasingly were promoting the use of environmental strategies to effect population-level change and “drive the numbers down” where substance abuse was concerned. This is not to say that the CPPs weren't utilizing environmental strategies—they were—for example, designing social marketing campaigns, as this project director mentioned:

*We'll still be doing our media campaign. We're going to “parents who host lose the most” which is our social marketing campaign. That's evidence based. It's all about parents providing alcohol to their kids. We did a little bit of that this year in the movie theaters ... If you go to a movie, if you're there an extra few movies, you'll see the logo and the ad and the gavel come down or like a radio DJ announces what it is ... Our movie ad is really doing well.*

However, based on how the CPPs categorized and reported their activities, the term “environmental strategies” did not appear to be widely understood by all participants at the

beginning of 2008, nor was its significance in terms of expectations and recommendations that environmental strategies be incorporated into local efforts. WV PRC grant management staff observed that CPPs' early efforts to incorporate environmental strategies into county-level planning appeared to be more accidental than intentional. As noted earlier, most counties dedicated the bulk of their time and money to implementing alternative or educational activities with youth.

At a series of "Mid-Point Plan Review" meetings that the WV PRC scheduled with CPP project directors and CDS in March of 2008, grant management and evaluation staff systematically reviewed and discussed the data that each CPP project director had reported in the recently-launched Community Level Instrument (CLI).<sup>2</sup> Working intensively with four to five CPPs each day for three days, grant management staff connected elements of each county's SPF SIG implementation planning and reporting to the larger question of whether counties were pursuing an appropriate mix of strategies, including environmental strategies.

An observer who attended one of the Mid-Point Plan Review meetings noted that, during the discussions that took place between staff of the CPPs and WV PRC grant administration and evaluation staff, she saw the "co-construction of knowledge" occurring as participants hammered out their understandings of what constitutes an environmental strategy and where environmental strategies already existed in CPPs' strategic prevention plans.

In the report that I prepared for the "Mid-Point Plan Review" meetings (held on March 4, 6, and 11, 2008) I found that several project directors already had identified "a disconnect" between the strategies being undertaken by their CPPs and the types of strategies (or potential results) implied by the questions they had to answer in their monthly reports on the Community Level Instrument:

*Many project directors and coalition members appeared hungry ... for a sense of how their efforts measured up to other efforts around the state and/or whether their SPF SIG efforts were consistent with the expectations of the federal government. ... Several project directors recognized that their coalitions' efforts did not seem to be in synch with the kind of information that the monthly progress reports and/or the CLI demanded. As I tried to figure out why this might be—and as I started reading more about federal expectations—I started to understand that a "disconnect" with federal goals might be a signal that requires closer examination.*

For example, after completing the extensive number of questions found on the CLI, one project director voiced concern that her local prevention plan did not appear to be doing what CSAP seemed to be looking for with SPF SIG. This project director noted that the kind of reporting called for on the CLI was

*unsuitable for the types of strategies and efforts that we planned for and are currently implementing...it wants to know how you're affecting your target population. Well [we] don't know because [we]'re raising awareness and trying to get people to think—number*

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<sup>2</sup> The Community Level Instrument, or CLI, is an extensive online report designed by Maya Tech for CSAP and is a requirement for all participants in the SPF SIG. All project directors are required to complete the CLI every six months. By the time the first CLI report became available online in January of 2008, project directors already had accumulated over a year's worth of data.

*one—that it’s a problem in our community and—number two—that there are efforts and ways to reduce it.*

The project director observed a slippage between her local CPP’s implementation plan and federal expectations:

*It seems to me there is a disconnect. When we first were exposed to CLI training last summer, they started referring to everything as ‘what your intervention is.’ They used the word ‘intervention’ and we had always used ‘effort,’ ‘approach,’ much softer and broader things. I’d love to be intervening for individuals or small groups but we’re not there yet.*

As a result of these types of observations, as well as the discussions that circulated during the Mid-Point Plan Review meetings, WV PRC grant management staff decided to return to the subject of environmental strategies at a two-day Implementation Grant Meeting (IGM) scheduled for April 30 and May 1, 2008.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the IGM—which included opportunities for all counties to report verbally to the rest of the group and share their accomplishments—also incorporated a presentation from Dr. Andy Whisman, the WV PRC’s senior evaluation specialist, sharing national research findings about the promotion of population-level change in connection with substance abuse.

Still, on the basis of ongoing monthly reporting as well as informal conversations that came up with project directors, the WV PRC grant management staff recognized that many CPPs continued to struggle not only with including environmental strategies in their local prevention efforts but also in understanding the very concept. In August of 2008, with the approval and support of the Partnership, the WV PRC arranged for a two-day workshop with Dr. Harold Holder, emeritus advisor and senior research scientist at the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) and someone who has studied alcohol policy and the impact of environmental strategies on community prevention efforts, specifically with alcohol. Most—although not all—of the CPP project directors attended this workshop, as well as WV PRC staff.

In his two-day presentation, Dr. Holder reinforced the significance of environmental strategies in connection with reducing alcohol consumption, noting repeatedly throughout the course of the workshop that “education isn’t enough” to reduce substance abuse. He stressed his research showing that simply the *perception* that one can be tested for alcohol is enough to reduce behaviors such as driving after drinking and that combining news/media coverage of sobriety checks and other enforcement strategies has proven to be effective. Dr. Holder also reviewed the CPPs’ strategic plans with each county’s representatives, pointing out those plans, for example, containing “too much emphasis on education.” He further stressed that “doing a few things well is most effective,” rather than engaging in multiple strategies, and encouraged project directors to continue to hone their planning and implementation.

Finally, at the last quarterly Implementation Grant Meeting of the year (November 17, 2008), which was held the day before the state-wide “Share the Vision” prevention conference, Dr. Andy Whisman offered a recap of the definition and purposes of environmental strategies as

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<sup>3</sup> Implementation Grant Meetings, held quarterly, are designed to offer ongoing support and meet the needs of the 17 SPF SIG funded CPPs, as well as to provide an opportunity for information sharing and networking between the counties.

part of a larger presentation that dealt with logic models and program fidelity. Thus, by year's end, CPP project directors had had the opportunity to come in contact with formal discussions about environmental strategies on four different occasions. Still, as a project director observed in an interview conducted during the summer of 2008, "Environmental strategies are hard ... to try and get your head around." Learning about environmental strategies would continue into 2009 as some CPPs appeared to "get" the concept and others continued to struggle.

- ***Locating Reliable Local Data and Learning to Use Evaluation***

Throughout 2008, various SPF SIG project directors reported feeling frustrated by their efforts to collect reliable local data and use it properly. CPP staffs spoke of struggling to locate and access "good" local data and to evaluate their prevention efforts in ways that would be valid and consistent with ethical practices (for example, in keeping with the requirements of an Institutional Review Board).

Since the inception of the SPF SIG, counties have struggled to find/hire people who have the local connections and social skills to help build a coalition as well as people skilled in the use of data and evaluation. Rarely have all of these qualities turned up in a single individual. For example, at the final Regional Learning Opportunity "Wrap-Up" meeting held for the 53 counties participating in SPF SIG in January 2007 (at the end of the Phase One planning year), a representative from Jackson County talked about the fact that his CPP initially had hired a project director who was proficient in gathering and using data but not in networking and relationship-building. Eventually, the Jackson County CCP discovered that it needed to replace the original project director with someone who was respected in the county for his outreach work with youth and possessed strong ties with local communities—someone who had the "people skills" to nurture the emerging coalition in its start-up phase. From the beginning, the Jackson County CPP recognized that both sets of skills were necessary to its prevention efforts, but in the short term—at least for the purposes of the planning year—the CPP discovered that having a project director who was both trusted in the community and proficient in relationship-building was more important for this initial phase of the SPF SIG.

By the same token, in Doddridge County in 2008, the CPP addressed this issue by hiring two individuals with complementary skills: a project director who possessed the social capital to effectively network at the local level, and a co-director who had the skills in gathering and using data as well as evaluation. At the time of their joint interview in 2008, the two co-directors spoke enthusiastically of the benefits of their collaboration. However, by the end of the year, the co-director who was more familiar with using data/evaluation had left the position.

The following are some of the observations that CPP project directors made in 2008 regarding their struggle to gather and use good local data as well as effectively evaluate their prevention efforts:

*One of our biggest challenges has been the collection of data. We don't really have data people in [our county]. Nobody at the level that we need. I know minimal things, like if I could do what some of the partners that we have minimally could help us, it's a huge commitment, as you know, to get people to help with the collection of data and then the evaluation of all of that data.*

*So that's where my frustration kind of kicks in, it's like well we don't have somebody here that would necessarily be able to do this [data collection] the correct way that it needs to be done or to even tell us how it needs to be done. So we're just trying our best, we're still doing it, we're not going to stop giving the surveys because some information is better than none.*

*A flaw in this SPF SIG process was an assumption that was made that every county had either the people or the expertise ... had the ability to do what they were asked to do. And that's not true, it just isn't. You have people who are very good-hearted, very energetic, committed passionate etcetera ... but they did not have the background in data analysis and some of the techniques that ... [are available in] the more populated ... counties. So that's a flaw. That was a real flaw, because the assumption was made that every county was the same and that's absolutely not true. There are certain tasks that need to have locals who are committed, passionate, well known, well respected ... so you need an individual that way. You also need an individual who has capability in writing and data analysis, a numbers person but one who can think logically.*

*In the long term my biggest concern is I don't think it will continue long enough and with reporting and numbers on abuse and use rates it takes at least a year to two years to get the numbers. So we're working off numbers that are really back when it started so you don't know when the changes have occurred .... maybe we should change things a little bit.*

In response to data provided in this report—and as the SPF SIG entered its final year, 2009-2010—the WV PRC was planning to hire two evaluators with community development experience who could assist counties in developing more proficiency with data collection and evaluation.

- ***Developing a Democratic Process in County Prevention Partnerships (CPPs)***

In the spring of 2008, after one of the Community Development Specialists (CDS) engaged the rest of the CDS network in a discussion of the relationship between CPP staff and their coalitions, WV PRC staff began to recognize that most CPP project directors continued to serve as the primary driving force behind the efforts of their local partnerships.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the direction and leadership of the CPPs remained a function primarily of the project directors and additional paid staff rather than their boards. Voting was not a common practice. Few CPPs had formed formal work groups or had established by-laws to enable a formal voting procedure. Another way of saying this might be that most counties had not yet begun to engage in a formal deliberative process of their own. In general, throughout 2008, coalition meetings took the form

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<sup>4</sup> During the 2006-07 planning year (Phase One of the SPF SIG), CDS met monthly to discuss the Regional Learning Opportunities (RLOs) they were implementing in their counties and to “de-brief” their experiences with each other. After several CDS noted that it was beneficial to be able to convene as a body, the decision was made to continue these “de-briefings” on a quarterly basis once the planning year ended and the counties began implementing their strategic plans. The CDS network adopted a case study approach to examining issues of concern in their counties. The issue of democratic process and coalition structure was introduced in the course of a case study presented in the spring of 2008.

of project directors “reporting out” to their boards about the various activities undertaken by CPP staff.

One of the CPPs’ top requests for technical assistance in 2008 was for help building the capacity of their coalitions, an issue that is linked to the overall sustainability of efforts (another top concern for CPPs) and mobilizing communities to engage with the work of the CPPs. In response to requests for technical assistance in these three areas (capacity building, sustainability, and mobilizing communities) and recognizing the role that CDS could potentially undertake in helping to support capacity building efforts in their counties (i.e., community development and substance abuse prevention are inextricably linked), the WV PRC began to investigate possible learning opportunities for CDS. In November 2008, the CDS began to participate in a state-wide learning initiative called Sustainable Communities, led by the Community Collaborative, Inc. The impact of this learning has yet to be assessed, since most of the Sustainable Communities training occurred in the first half of 2009. However, one of the goals discussed in early planning meetings was to help CDS become “community coaches” with skills appropriate to providing broad support to their communities. In other words, community development and prevention are part of the same system and call for a level of skill and support that the CDS are well positioned to deliver.

By the end of 2008, most CPPs still did not have formal decision-making structures in place. Several project directors spoke of the fact that, while the membership of their local CPP offered opinions and engaged in discussion, it was not a decision-making body:

*The coalition doesn’t really make any decisions, to be honest ... they voice their opinions a lot, we all seem to be on the same page with things. We’re not, I don’t think we’re grabbing at anything that is really controversial. So, none of our activities that we’re doing, we’ve never had anybody express an opinion that we shouldn’t be doing that. So, the coalition is about the same as it’s been.*

*The [coalition] ... is more there to back up decisions. I mean we’re allowed to ask opinions and take votes that way, but they’re not like a governing group or anything, but they’re more just support.*

*I’m pretty pleased with the coalition, it’s a group of people that know each other well as far as working relationships go so it makes it easy to reach out and say hey, can you help with this or can you help me with this. If I don’t know something I can go to the person that I think is going to know it. They’re getting to be a little more hands on because I think it’s documented that ours has been a coordinator-run group. ... I think that we all need more time. Everybody is so busy. That’s one of the biggest problems I’ve seen. It’s not that they don’t want to do more, it’s that they don’t have time. So I think it’s going to take us as coordinators to come up with some innovative ways to allow them to be involved.*

A projector director mentioned that voting was utilized in some but not all decisions:

*Up to this point, it’s just been very broad and so the decisions are broad as well and I mean, I feel very supported by this group. We want to see if, do we need to have things like consensus based decisions versus a democratic you know kind of process. We had voted on things like, when we first started putting some PSAs out there last year. You know, we showed them and we voted on which one we liked the best. But, it’s just not*

*been big major decisions like policy decisions. We were just talking about that yesterday but as things get a little more political in nature, we're going to have to understand where we come from as a partnership. Particularly if the project director is speaking from the partnership.*

Another project director spoke of the CPP as an informal "sounding board" that provided feedback to the CPP staff:

*We use the coalition for feed back, to get opinions, to get ideas, we try to funnel everything through the coalition because they are basically our sounding board for the community. I mean it's made up of members of the community, a lot of different types of services, agencies; a lot of different fields are represented. So we use them as a sounding board and we'll get ideas from them. ... Yesterday we had our coalition meeting and we were doing reviewing, we just had National Kids Day last weekend and kind of did a wrap up of that and talked about the results and already started talking about ideas for next year and gathered a lot of feed back on that, there were some good ideas generated from that. We won't move on it until next year, but basically they serve as our sounding board. Sometimes it's just good to get feed back from someone other than the three of us and it's perfect to have the group that represents the community to be that sounding board.*

Staff in one of the smaller counties mentioned that monthly meetings were not possible for its CPP, and so they met only once every three months.

*We're only meeting quarterly ... we just decided that we just couldn't meet anymore than that with the commitments that our coalition partners already have.*

Finding an effective structure for the coalition was a concern shared by many counties:

*And we need a structure. We need a base before we can go anywhere and you know ... [my county], the SPF SIG project is real sparse. ... I think the biggest thing is capacity building right now ... we can't do hardly anything without it.*

One project director mentioned that work groups formed within the coalition on an "as-needed" basis:

*We have an evaluation group that meets a good bit, toying with different things, whenever we come up with our reporting. And then we just have a work group, they're usually are just about five or six of us that if we need something we really just sit around the table and get it done.*

Another project director spoke enthusiastically of the recent development of CPP work groups, finding them to be an asset to the

*We did start the smaller work groups and that, to me, has seemed to be more helpful. I feel like we've gotten more done. It just seems more work gets done in a smaller group as opposed to 20 or 25 people sitting around. I do see that. I think it's more valuable for people because if there is a need for them to meet, they'll meet, it's not just meeting for*

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*meeting's sake they'll meet around a project so I do think that that's something that's been helpful that's been a change in structure that we just started. I think it started around February or March. So that's something I am happy with.*

Expanding their coalition membership was an ongoing concern of project directors, which was related to building the overall capacity of the CPPs:

*In my opinion, we have a working coalition for the things that we want to do, we want to get done now. There are things in the future that are going to require new players, we're going to work on that.*

A related finding (reported in the section on enabling factors) is that CPPs that emerged from already-functioning coalitions or partnerships such as the Family Resource Network (FRN) in Marshall County or the P.I.E.C.E.S. coalition in Logan, enjoyed an advantage. Their prior relationships of trust as well as experience in leadership and decision-making helped these coalitions begin to move towards establishing a deliberative process earlier than some of the newer CPPs.

- **Loss of Key Staff and/or Key CPP Membership**

When a CPP lost a project director, the overall progress of the CPP slowed, at least temporarily. In 2008, four counties (Fayette, Lincoln, Mercer, Morgan) lost a project director and one county (Doddridge) lost a co-director with key skills in data and evaluation. In another case, the loss of a key board member also had an impact on a CPP's efforts. For example, at the end of 2008, Logan County lost the leadership of a local pastor with a background in substance abuse counseling who had broken new ground by establishing a faith-based work group that was an important contributor to the Logan CPP's efforts. Under the pastor's guidance, Logan's faith-based work group typically met for an hour before each of the CPP meetings to discuss the ways in which pastors could contribute to local substance abuse prevention, intervention, treatment, or recovery efforts. The results of such changes have yet to be assessed.

Three of the counties that hired new project directors—Fayette, Mercer, and Morgan—were able to plan for the transition in advance. As one of the outgoing project directors noted, a new project director could bring new assets to the process:

*I believe very strongly in transitions. ... I really believe in this process, the community development process, and I think the SPF SIG project and process is a big part of it ... I think it was good for me and for the partnership to have me doing the beginning phase ... [the new project director] is bringing a whole new group of people into this because of [the new project director's] contacts ... I think it is going to be a great thing. I think [the new project director] has got some skills that I don't ... the perfect next person.*

In Morgan County, staffing was reshuffled when its full-time project director left and a new, part-time project director was hired. For this CPP, the loss of the original project director enabled it to strategically re-shuffle its staff and simultaneously increase its investment in environmental strategies.

*When we went to [a part-time] project director, it freed up money for another position. So what we're doing is, we have ... the person with the environmental strategy focus...*

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*then the other position that we created as a school year [position] is prevention educator and that's the person who would be doing Too Good for Drugs in the school.*

The long-term results of these changes in leadership have yet to be assessed but will be revisited in reporting on the final year of the SPF SIG (2009-2010).

### **Enabling Factors**

- ***Approaching Prevention as Community Development***

As the project director quoted below mentioned, prevention is tied to many other needs in a county. This project director talked about how the work of her CPP was part of a larger system, in effect part of overall community development:

*And we had ... some great organizations, but we also had some needs that weren't even being considered and I mean, substance abuse is only one small part of it. Economic development and just, transportation, I mean for goodness sake, if we could do anything with transportation, we could do all kinds of programming. But we can't, nobody can get anywhere and that, I mean that is a huge, huge need in this county that we are still going to be working on and that's kind of the base stuff, and not that we've really made that much progress in that but just getting to the place where maybe we could consider it, is there anybody in the county who could even consider searching for funding and have the capacity to support that kind of thing but I mean, very big basic things and I think there are a lot of counties in WV that are struggling with that kind of stuff.*

The recognition that community development and prevention are part of an interrelated system has been crucial to the evolution of the state's comprehensive, coordinated planning associated with the SPF SIG. As mentioned earlier in this report, at the end of 2008 the CDS began to participate in a learning initiative designed to help them become "community coaches," building and enhancing skills to facilitate community capacity-building at all levels. The impetus for this kind of learning stemmed from a growing awareness—an awareness born of the SPF SIG process, which laid the foundation for the establishment of CPPs as democratic decision-making bodies—that communities were struggling to find ways to embrace a deliberative process in which the entire community could participate.

In keeping with such guiding principles as, "local people solve local problems best" and "people support what they help create," the Partnership and the staff of the WV PRC have continued to enhance community-level efforts to address substance abuse and, in that process, to build a sustainable community infrastructure that will outlast the SPF SIG.

- ***Building CPPs on Pre-existing Coalitions/Structures Within the Community***

When CPPs developed out of pre-existing structures like the Family Resource Networks (FRNs), the FRN director often provided experienced leadership and direction for the CPP, which appears to be an enabling factor. Several project directors spoke of the advantages of working through their local FRN, especially where resources in the county were limited:

*That's why we have it with the FRN because we're a small community ... 7,000 total ... you've got a handful of people working prevention and cross-agency ... we were meeting just about every day with the same group of people and finally said this is ridiculous, set one meeting [that lasts] practically the whole day so we're not traveling, everybody's not traveling.*

*We are going to be a part of the Family Resource Network here in [our] county and that is the only way we will survive, is to, for us to do this together because its just, first of all there's only one paid employee for the partnership, there's only one paid employee for the FRN and that's not entirely true cause we have contracted workers with the partnership to help with programming but I mean as far as really developing this organization and you just can't do it all by yourself. You need, at least we can work together because our missions and goals are very similar.*

At least one project director noted that his/her CPP's alliance with the local FRN and its director encouraged the CPP to explore a deliberative process that would promote the coalition as a decision-making body, rather than being led by the project director and his/her staff:

*We have a chair, [our FRN director] ... she's not elected, she's kind of appointed herself. Once we did that organizational capacity assessment ... we had four things that were identified as short-comings ... one dealt with our decision making process ... we really didn't have a decision making process ... We took that back to coalition, we discussed it, and the coalition decided that we would use Robert's Rules of Order for our meetings. So, I believe ... in May they decided to use Robert's Rules ... hopefully that makes it a more democratic process in terms of our decision making. But as I understand it ... we need to vote and select a chair and all kinds of things. ... I'm big on making sure the community feels like it has ownership of something. Not that one agency or another has ownership of the process. That's been a thing and it's been a recurring conversation.*

Where CPPs had established work groups, committees, or other working entities in the community before the inception of the SPF SIG, these ties also were mentioned as an enabling factor:

*Well, actually, I think we're fortunate that we have a community and a community group ... we kind of stepped into a situation that already existed where everybody was kind of on the same page, all the members of the coalition. What SPF SIG... has done is allowed us to develop that further, but to be honest when I started three years ago it was a pretty good situation already ... our agencies and our members of the coalition have been wonderful ... They began in 1997 without any, as far as I know, without any grant funding. ... With SPF SIG funding things have really kind of taken off.*

*As I understand it, [our county's] FRN had a youth and families committee. We still do, but as far as that youth and families committee, there were some people that were concerned about alcohol and drug use in the county. So they then decided that they wanted to work on that issue, applied for [a] ... scholarship for training that was held in July of 2003 .. and then came back and formed it. It's not really very formal, I would say, it's still, we don't operate under our own set of bylaws or anything like that, we're very much under the FRN's umbrella.*

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*Plus the capacity building, I think probably the biggest success has been with just kind of continuing to build the basis of support and we have, that group, I mean we constantly have a great group of people there at those meetings and it seems like every event we do or anything, we have a really good group of support people. So I feel really good about that.*

However, even for project directors who had been working in prevention in their counties before the SPF SIG, engaging with the SPF SIG process could prove challenging:

*We decided we needed to do something about substance abuse [in my county] in September of 2005 ... Then the SPF SIG started in February of 2006 ... We were just a group trying to figure out what we were going to do. Then SPF SIG came in and built structure within it. "This is what we have to do because this is part of the grant." ... I was still inexperienced in that first year and even the second year was trial and error. This year has been the year that's been, "Okay, now I get all that stuff."*

A project director representing a CPP that developed out of an existing partnership noted that he/she now viewed the assistance of the SPF SIG as beneficial, despite initial doubts:

*I think that in the long run that [our county] is really thankful for the SPF SIG opportunity and for it being the next step in [creating] a more clear and defined community process. I think it's what we needed as we got gung ho to create a new FRN and to start trying to attack these issues. I think without this process, we just would have run into dead ends ... it gave us a way to go on and to have a little bit of understanding about what it was we needed to do so I think we are all really thankful, even if we weren't sure if we were at the beginning of the process. And so, you know, sticking to it, and really the PRC sticking with us because you know we could have been nixed and it could have just stopped right there. So I think we really appreciate the opportunity.*

Collaboration with other entities within the county—as a project director said, a “we’ll help you and you’ll help us approach”—also proved to be an enabling factor for several CPPs, as reflected in this project director’s comment:

*We have some new members, we have some new active members ... the Magistrate's office has been a coalition partner but she has taken on a much more active role, which has been extremely helpful for us. But we've also been involved with the community corrections program. So it was kind of a “we’ll help you and you help us” so we’ve both been actively engaged in each other’s programs.*

All of these comments point to the centrality of developing effective, strong relationships and to partnering with the right people/organizations as part of the process of coalition-building.

- **Increased Resources**

“Money” often proved to be the answer to the question, “So what do you think is the main strength of this project so far in your county?” However, “money” also translates into the ability to hire qualified paid staff to serve local CPPs and help build their capacity. Thus, money and staffing were mentioned as intertwined resources.

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*Number one, it's having the money to spend in the county. ... But the biggest thing is, I've worked on different projects before and coming into this—because of how it was organized—you had to have a coalition. This is probably my first time being part of a “coalition.” I've been part of committees and advisory boards and this is a new name for us. So it was exciting in that aspect because it was new.*

*Without the money, we wouldn't have been able to do it. Let me rephrase that. Without the money we wouldn't have been able to get it started.*

*I swear I think our biggest success as a coalition, I'll say our biggest success with this SPF SIG grant, I'll put it that way—is diversifying by hiring employees. I think without that, you can't have, you might have five things on your plan and I might be able to accomplish those five things, but in order to be all-encompassing and doing all the things that we're doing... [you need] staff. And I think without that you pretty much got nothing.*

This finding—that “money” regularly is mentioned as one of the top enabling factors of the SPF SIG—is consistent with findings that have been reported by the outside evaluation team since the inception of the SPF SIG in West Virginia.

- **Learning**

Along with “money,” “learning” was mentioned as one of the most important enabling factors of the SPF SIG process. One of the tools for ongoing learning has been the Regional Learning Opportunities (RLOs) offered more or less on a monthly basis in the four DHHR regions of the state. The WV PRC initiated the RLO process during the Phase One/Planning Year (2006-07) in which 53 counties took part. At that time, RLOs were mandatory for all project directors and functioned as a means by which CDS and CPP staff alike learned to use data and research to fuel SPF SIG planning and writing the SPF SIG application. After Phase One ended and 17 CPPs were funded for implementation, the funded CPPs took over the process of organizing RLOs around topics identified of interest to participants. RLOs remained open to all counties regardless of whether or not they were receiving ongoing SPF SIG funds. Throughout 2008, some regions struggled to hold RLOs and utilize them to their advantage, while others held regular monthly RLO meetings.

*I wouldn't be half the project director I am today if it were not for those RLOs because it brings all those people together who are doing basically the same job—but differently—and lets you know what works in another community. You can draw from that and get ideas and see the successes of it.*

*So I do think the RLOs have been important for me in ways ... we try to do them quarterly in this region ... a lot of times they come at really bad times. And it's really hard when you're just busy, busy, busy, working at this stuff and then you need to take an entire day to drive, and most of it has been driving and so I didn't quite understand why people, that had been here longer, were a little resistant to them. Now, as I'm here longer, I understand the resistance. Because you know if we could wrinkle our nose and be there and not have to drive, sometimes it can be 5 hours, 6 hours of driving.*

Some of the learning mentioned in interviews was more general and had to do with the day-to-day experience of managing the local CPPs:

*It's certainly been a learning experience. I came out here, never written a grant before, so all of that was new. The PRC has been—well, I can't sing their praises enough ... they have always been just very helpful ... if I was struggling, they were there to answer questions ... just total encouragement ... It has been a learning experience ... And it's been a great learning experience to help the community ... it has brought a great awareness not through me but through the program.*

*I think the strongest element for me has been the learning experience that comes about from SPF SIG training. Learning the importance of collaboration, learning about implementation, forcing yourself to meet people in the community ... That's just been a fantastic learning experience.*

And another project director noted that having access to data and learning to evaluate initiatives was helpful. Access to reliable data and evaluation has been mentioned earlier in this report as one of the challenges of the SPF SIG; however, learning how to use/access data and evaluation was reported by this project director as an enabling factor:

*Data ... and evaluation ... [At first] I didn't understand evaluation and how you went about on every level of it, even if you finished a minor project you would evaluate it to see how things could have gone better ... having to do that for this project has allowed me to look back and reflect on the stuff that was done ... it's helped our coalition grow from that standpoint, we know what works and what doesn't work.*

Learning has been essential to building flexibility within CPPs—to enabling CPPs to continuously assess their efforts and revise their planning in response to new tools that become available at the federal level or as circumstances change at the local level. So, for example, “learning” already has been mentioned in this report in connection with developing a shared understanding of environmental strategies and the fact that the concept of environmental strategies was foreign to many participants in the SPF SIG process at its inception. Noted earlier as a challenge/opportunity, the learning involved with developing a shared understanding of environmental strategies can also be seen as an enabling factor to the SPF SIG process.

- **Flexibility**

Flexibility, including the ability to shift planning, proved essential for all of the CPPs in responding to changes in their planning for implementation in 2008. For example, in one case, a CPP found it could not implement the school-based Too Good for Drugs curriculum in its school system as hoped and revised its planning as a result:

*Well, we're still navigating; we're still in the process of navigating ... we have a committee off of the coalition that is specifically for Too Good for Drugs and we learned that we need a game plan ... So we're just trying to, like I said, navigate around these things as if we can ... We took the plan ... [and] we updated our other logic models too. We use our SPF funds to focus on our alcohol issues, but when we first did the plan we had tobacco and marijuana issues as well. So we updated everything, we took the tobacco portion we actually applied for tobacco money ... [our county] has a tobacco county coalition that runs under the health department and then we also have the anti-drug coalition that the FRN spearheads ... In any event, we took that logic model, we were able to apply for money through the American Lung Association and were awarded*

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*it. So we were able to fund a portion of that logic model with that data too, so I think things are going pretty well with the implementation.*

In another case, changes in the CPP's staff and a need to broaden the coalition's focus beyond individual education to incorporate more environmental strategies led to a restructuring of the CPP's plan:

*Right, well we actually restructured it, I think in our last reporting cycle, we got the budget approval to restructure things a little bit ... we've created a Prevention Educator Position, which is going to be partially funded from Safe and Drug Free Schools, we'll be working in the schools to do the Too Good for Drugs Program and then we're also looking to bring in a prevention specialist who will be doing the environmental strategies trying to target the community attitudes on drinking and substance abuse. But that's what we're working with now.*

A project director whose brand-new CPP came into being as a result of the SPF SIG funding reflected on the way in which coalition membership has grown in response to local events and the ability of the CPP to respond flexibly and offer assistance when needed:

*Then all of a sudden some incidents happen where we get bomb threats in the high school. One of the things that was set forth in ... [our strategic prevention] plan was to pursue putting a Prevention Resource Officer in the school system. But that was to be done with other money, not SPF SIG money. ... Now everybody's riled up about our schools and we have the school system already on board. ... We float the idea of a Prevention Resource Officer ... we provided a life preserver for the county commission because they didn't have any idea what to do. "Here's a proven program," and all that stuff—so it began to work. ... So now we have just expanded our working coalition. We now have full cooperation from the board of education. We have cooperation, at least, from the county commission.*

In terms of the 2008 SPF SIG, flexibility is both an outgrowth of the scientific approach that is integral to the Strategic Prevention Framework—an ongoing cycle of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation—as well as a function of the way in which the Partnership and the WV PRC have administered the SPF SIG. The Partnership and WVPRC have intentionally sought to provide learning opportunities that promote local ownership, learning, knowledge, and process and have facilitated multiple opportunities for feedback from CPPs, including this qualitative report. All reports—especially the monthly online reports required of all 17 CPPs—are scrutinized by grant management and evaluation staff and shared at quarterly Partnership meetings so that feedback also informs decision-making at the state level.

### **Unexpected consequences of SPF SIG Implementation**

- ***Impact of Underage Drinking Prevention Efforts on Tobacco Sales***

One CPP found that its county's numbers of tobacco sales to minors dropped significantly in 2008; the project director surmised that the drop might be linked to the alcohol education and compliance efforts the CPP had implemented:

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*This year we did those alcohol compliance checks in the Spring and when we did the TIPS trainings we did alcohol and tobacco merchant education on both ends. Then I had unofficially obtained the statistic that no one sold tobacco this year and we haven't had that in the two or three years since I've worked here. I can't say it was a direct relationship because we certainly weren't just providing [education to] the tobacco merchants, but I do think it certainly helped. I think people are more aware of the fact that just the coalition exists because like I said, '03 the coalition started and I really don't think people knew that it existed until we got some of these funds.*

- **Dialogue with Community Members as a Catalyst for Legislative Action**

For one of the CPPs, the process of assessing community norms and engaging community members in conversations about substance abuse provided additional unlooked-for benefits. This project director noted that some of the surveys she and her staff were conducting in their community, primarily in connection with implementing Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol (CMCA) and the one-on-one conversations she and staff conducted with community members, marked the beginning of a shift in attitude and a growing interest in pursuing legislative action:

*The other thing I think that is a success ... is a changing attitude or perspective ... we have a lot of interest in changing legislation and I just don't think that people are aware because there was no one place where everyone took their concerns and we're really finding it through the one-on-ones when you pool the recurring theme.*

- **Increased Accountability**

One of the project directors interviewed specifically noted the high degree of accountability connected with the SPF SIG as a positive element of the process:

*Every month I have to answer for what I've done. I have to keep track of what's going on, they know where the money is going. I don't see how there could possibly be any waste in this because it is such a system ... everyone is going through with their programs, everything has to be approved. They check in mid-point to see if you're doing it, they check at the end for evaluation. So for me, that's sound business.*

While this observation represents a data "outlier," since the majority of project directors have commented on the burden that SPF SIG accountability and record-keeping has imposed on them, it nonetheless represents an unintended consequence: accountability that includes regular and ongoing reporting. In turn, this ongoing reporting has provided a tool for feedback and insight within the WV PRC into the degree and type of technical assistance counties require in order to be successful in their prevention efforts. So, for example, the CPP's online reports have helped to fuel the discussion within the WV PRC regarding the role of the Community Development Specialists (CDS) as community coaches with the capacity to offer technical assistance that meets the needs the CPPs have outlined in their reports.

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## Concluding Thoughts

As the SPF SIG enters its final year in the state of West Virginia, comprised of a “bonus” sixth year of funding in 2009-2010 thanks to unexpended funds from prior years, CPPs will continue to engage with all of the issues addressed in this report, plus one more that remains conspicuously absent from this report: sustainability. Sustainability has been a concern of CPP project directors since the inception of the SPF SIG. As the SPF SIG enters its final year of funding, sustainability becomes a much more pressing concern. The following excerpt from a “Notes From the Field” report prepared by the outside evaluation team and dated January 19, 2007, offers an observation from a project director who already was pondering the issue of sustainability:

*We have observed a continued mixture of attitudes toward the present status and the future of the county-based SPF-SIG-related prevention efforts. In one instance we observed a growing sense of optimism and determination on the part of a Project Director who said that she was sure the host site “would continue to provide office space and she would work for them as a volunteer if need be” if they were not funded for a second year. She went on to say that the “coalition has no intention of dissolving regardless of the [future of the] implementation grant.” She described her county’s SPF-SIG initiative as having “staying power.”*

While the project director quoted in the above excerpt was optimistic in his/her outlook on the future of the CPP in his/her county, another project director that I interviewed in November, 2007, expressed worry when asked to identify his/her main concern regarding the SPF SIG project in his/her county, saying that it was “Funding ... sustainability.” This project director went on to say that

*I got hired in 2007 and the grant ends in 2009 ... I think when I got obtained my position having two years for implementation sounded like a good amount of time. But I think that’s naïve. I know this has been a longer process before I got hired...I just think it’s very scary that the grant runs out in 2009 and we need to have something else in place for sustainability. With all the implementation activities and evaluation activities, just planning and having coalition meetings, it’s very hard at 32 hours a week to seek out sustainability. That takes a lot of time and that’s something I’m going to have to prioritize.*

In a report entitled “Notes From the Twelve” focusing on the first cohort of CPPs funded for implementation and prepared for the January, 2008 Partnership meeting, I wrote that the newer coalitions experienced more anxiety about the issue of sustaining their prevention efforts than some of the coalitions that had been up and running before SPF SIG funds came into the state:

*The need to build a coalition or partnership that will outlast the SPF SIG raises concerns about sustainability—and sustainability is something that is on the mind of every single project director.*

*Generally speaking, project directors whose coalitions still are forming are more worried about sustaining them than project directors whose coalitions and partnerships pre-date the SPF SIG. “If I don’t figure out how to develop a really good, strong partnership in the county to keep the programs going, it’s just going to die off,” said one project*

director, while another noted with concern, “I truly believe if I left tomorrow this wouldn’t last much longer.”

Almost two years have elapsed since this data was collected. Since then, some CPPs have made significant strides in seeking additional sources of funding (for example, Marshall County successfully applied for a Drug Free Communities grant that was awarded in 2008) or in strengthening their coalitions to ensure ongoing community support for their efforts. Other CPPs have continued to struggle with these concerns.

In the meantime, the Partnership has continued to gain increased visibility at the state level, for example advising the office of the Governor on the allocation of some of the funds received through a settlement with Purdue Pharma, and the WV PRC has continued to apply for additional federal grants on behalf of the Partnership. Additionally, the WV PRC continues to track and report the staggering cost of substance abuse to the state. Finally, in 2009, a swiftly rising rate of unintended deaths cause by misuse of prescription drugs has focused additional attention, both state and federal, on WV. While the long-term impact of the groundwork laid by the SPF SIG has yet to be assessed, the elements currently in place as a result of the five-year SPF SIG process have positioned the Partnership, the WV PRC, and the local CPPs to participate within a system that did not exist prior to 2004.

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