
WORKING THE PLAN

What must be done to keep the initiative moving forward?

Staying Connected

You have designed a program, created an organizational structure, assessed the drug threat, isolated the targets, assembled a team of dedicated volunteers to plot strategy, and formulated specific action plans. These are crucial, fundamental—and perhaps the most difficult—steps in putting together a Major Cities initiative. However, the job is far from over. In some ways it has just begun. Now that you have planned the work, it is time to work the plan.

Running a Major Cities project is an ongoing effort that requires constant vigilance and close attention to the three M's: meetings, maintenance, and monitoring. Meetings are a necessary part of the initiative. Because circumstances and personalities differ from one community to another, there are no rules regarding meetings or establishing a meeting timetable, only general guidelines. The key is to pick a schedule that is convenient for everyone and allows frequent interaction.

Members of the Steering Committee should meet at least once every few months to discuss the success of particular strategies and recommend course changes, if necessary. Because most of the initiative's business is conducted through the Task Forces, these specialized groups should meet more frequently—at least once a month—to monitor the progress of their action plans. At every meeting, members should review the status of each plan and determine if it still conforms to the long-term goals. Ask someone to take notes at the meetings to document the work performed.

Although regular meetings are vital for keeping the initiative alive, the bulk of the work will occur outside the meetings, as members forge new partnerships in the community and maintain existing ones. Partnerships, like all relationships, require nurturing and ongoing involvement. Outreach efforts should encourage participation, as people are generally more willing to support what they helped to create.

KEY POINTS

- Meet often and regularly—every few months for the Steering Committee and at least once a month for individual Task Forces.
- Publicize meeting dates, times, and locations to encourage participation and community-wide representation.
- Evaluate your progress: Have the action plans worked as intended? Are they still the most appropriate response to the threat?
- Recruit other dedicated individuals into the effort, keeping in mind that constructive partnerships require close interaction in several key areas:
 - communication
 - time management
 - conflict resolution
 - planning and involvement
 - collaborative decision-making

The drug picture may suddenly change – what then?

Monitoring the Threat

Drug use does not follow a predictable pattern; trends can change course almost overnight. Thus, the drug problem your community faced when the program started may be quite different a few months down the road. If the threat picture has changed—if other types of drugs are involved, for instance, or if the drug dealers have altered their tactics—your action plans may now be ineffective or irrelevant. Over the course of the initiative, take regular pulse checks to make sure the program is working. It is imperative that you stay abreast of changes in the drug scene and adjust your plans accordingly.

To that end, the program should include some kind of mechanism for ongoing review and analysis of the drug threat. The tools for this process are built into the structure of the initiative. For example, in the team-building stage of the program, special care was taken to include people with unique knowledge about drug use in your community. Consult with them regularly and share their insights with the full membership.

Also early in the program, the group relied on data from surveys and other sources to help assess the community's drug problem and plan its response. Many of those same sources are excellent tools for gathering feedback and monitoring the impact of the program over time. (See the "Resources" section for a list of data sources.) Continue to mine these and other sources that shed light on local drug use. Any perceived changes in the threat should be discussed routinely at meetings and also included in any Steering Committee documentation, including memos, e-mails, reports, brochures, and slide presentations.

It is important to maintain an accurate record of output—the specific actions your group takes. Similarly, an effort should be made to document *outcomes*—those changes that come about as a direct result of the initiative's actions.

For example, if the data sources show a large number of adolescents in treatment for marijuana dependence, your group's prevention Task Force might plan an awareness initiative that uses public ads, school speakers, and editorials in community newsletters, newspapers, and on local television. It would be helpful, certainly, to know how many youth were reached by this awareness campaign. Even better, though, would be information on how many of these young people developed a negative perception of marijuana use as a direct result of this outreach. The Task Force in such a case might designate or create a data source to track the attitudes of youth toward marijuana both *before* and *after* the awareness campaign. It might also anticipate a decrease in youth treatment admissions as young people decide not to use.

KEY POINTS

- Study data sources that can shed light on local drug use throughout the course of the initiative; stay alert to any changes in the drug picture, and adjust plans accordingly.
 - Consult regularly with substance-abuse experts, and share the findings with all initiative participants.
 - Document actions taken as well as any changes that come about as a direct result of those actions.
 - Make sure a feedback loop is in place, and that it is linked to decision makers for both input and output.
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How can participants help ensure the program's success?

Reaching Out

To keep up with the drug threat and develop appropriate action plans, it is necessary to stay flexible. The better your organization's ability to identify and adapt to shifting dynamics in the local drug landscape, the more likely its efforts will have a positive effect. Watch the data closely for signs of change—such as new drugs of choice, surges in the use of certain drugs, spikes in use among specific populations—and be ready to develop appropriate responses.

Meetings should periodically include updates on data that indicate the substance-abuse picture has changed. The beauty of the program's collaborative approach is that it helps communities build their capacity to respond to problems that arise as time goes on. Once the Working Group has gelled into a cohesive and functional partnership, the Steering Committee and Task Forces should be able to move quickly, secure agreement, and plan actions regarding a wide range of issues.

Success breeds success. As achievements mount, your program will gain momentum that allows it to expand its partnership to include other individuals, groups, and resources that can, in turn, help move the initiative closer to its goal. For example, the group may find that its efforts to shut down open-air drug markets are undermined by a cycle of prostitution that feeds and is fed by women in those areas who are addicted to drugs. The Criminal Justice Task Force may then decide to explore innovative ways to facilitate substance-abuse treatment and recovery for these women, such as a prostitution drug court that offers treatment as an option to prolonged jail sentences. To accomplish this, it may be necessary to create partnerships with treatment providers who specialize in supporting this population, as well as with law enforcement officials who handle prostitution crimes and officials in the judicial system who can coordinate assessment and rehabilitation services for these women.

KEY POINTS

- Stay flexible.
 - Watch the data for signs of new or emerging trends in local drug activity, and be ready to respond quickly.
 - Provide data updates and progress reports at each meeting.
 - Make sure all partners adhere to the strategies collaboratively developed.
 - Always seek new information and other views.
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