

Building Relationships

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Relationship building as it relates to community organizing is a strategy that brings organizations, agencies, and individuals together to build a power base of expertise, education, knowledge and command to address a common issue cooperatively.

As critical as community organizing is to delivering a successful community strategy, a viable relationship-building approach is critical to community organizing. To ensure an efficient and professional working team, engaging the appropriate and suitable group of individuals and organizations to deliver the product is the first step. To meet this end, there are a few considerations to explore to bring about the desirable outcomes: Who needs to be at the table and why they are critical to the project; and how do we engage these individuals and organizations.

In setting up a new project, the first step is to identify the stakeholders we need at the table to successfully deliver the outcomes desired. Listing these individuals and groups and identifying what they offer is a helpful way to begin the process. To ensure that the essential and appropriate stakeholders are identified, spend some time to identify these groups and individuals. Listing what they offer and why they are critical can help identify duplication of skills and expertise and help in creating a manageable core group. This list also will help to ensure a well-balanced working group that offers valuable but unique experience and understanding of the issues. Groups to consider are:

- Law enforcement-- Police/Sheriff, District Attorneys, Judges, Probation/Parole
- Treatment providers
- Recovery community
- Researchers
- Elected officials
- Medical providers
- County and city officials/agencies
- Business community
- School districts
- Neighborhood groups
- Students
- Prevention providers
- Individuals without agency affiliations, but a passion for the issue

It is important to not only identify professionals, but also individuals that will bring a unique and balanced core to the project. In a project such as a Meth Prevention Task Force, the more obvious member of this task force would be law enforcement, prevention experts, county alcohol and drug administration and elected officials. These groups offer expertise, knowledge, influence and power. Other individuals and groups that may not come to mind as quickly as others and should be given serious consideration are the recovery community, youth and neighborhood groups. These individuals and groups not only offer skills and knowledge to the project, but also offer manpower and a valuable perspective and balance to the group.

Once these individuals and groups are identified, the next task is engagement. Some simple strategies that will help in engaging members are:

- Present the problem and offer the solution—Be prepared to concisely present the problem and have available a solution with reasons why the proposed members are critical to achieving the desired outcomes.
- “What’s in it for me”—Many individuals are very busy and will not get involved in something new unless you can present a compelling argument of how it will benefit them or the organization they represent.