

Community Resources and Readiness Assessment

Introduction

The community readiness assessment tool is a paper and pencil survey that will help you gather information from knowledgeable persons (i.e., “key informants”) in your community about their perceptions of the community’s readiness to address and take action on substance abuse in general and the three SPF priorities in particular. This document is intended to explain the process of conducting the data collection for the community readiness assessment. In addition to referring to this document, the accompanying resource materials, and the learning community discussions on community readiness, you are encouraged to contact the state Evaluation Coordinator, Katy Cahill at kcahill@vdh.state.vt.us if you have questions about conducting your community readiness assessment.

Background

Considerable attention in recent years has been focused on the concepts of community capacity, resources, and readiness. Views differ on the exact meanings of these terms and their relationships to one another. Capacity seems to be the most general of the three terms, while resources and readiness are viewed as two more specific and very important aspects of community capacity.

Some of the most influential work in this area has been conducted by the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research in Colorado. Their efforts have focused specifically on the concept of readiness, although it is clear that resources are part of their framework as well. The theory underlying community readiness suggests that communities vary in their ability to effectively address significant public health and safety issues, such as substance abuse. Further, there are nine specific levels, or stages, of readiness, and that a community's ability to address problems increases as the community moves through these nine stages.

The theory also suggests that efforts to implement interventions for which the community is not ready are likely to encounter barriers and therefore less likely to be successfully implemented. Guidance from the Tri-Ethnic Research Center provides suggestions for how to help advance communities through the stages of readiness (Plested et al., 1998; Edwards et al., 2000).

Stages of Community Readiness:

1. Tolerance of problem
2. Denial
3. Vague Awareness
4. Pre-planning
5. Preparation
6. Initiation
7. Institutionalization
8. Confirmation and expansion
9. Professionalization

More background information on community readiness and how to help move communities to stages of greater readiness will be presented through the learning communities. There are also three helpful review papers and an additional readiness assessment tool (the Tri-Ethnic survey) included in your folders. These resources are intended to provide you with a broad overview of community readiness and related concepts. Keep in mind, however, that community readiness is an evolving theoretical construct. This means that it will be wise to view the community assessment as an open-ended process that can help you learn about the groups you are serving. The results of your community's readiness assessment can be used to gauge your community's status with regard to interest and preparedness for engaging in the SPF-SIG process.

The Vermont SPF-SIG Community Resources and Readiness Assessment Tool

Numerous community assessment tools developed over the past several years were identified and reviewed for possible use in Vermont. The Tri-Ethnic Research Center Community Readiness Assessment was one of the tools we considered. Several features of that particular instrument, however, were seen as potentially problematic for use with Vermont's SPF-SIG grantees. In particular, that instrument is entirely open-ended and needs to be completed through a personal interview of community key informants. The entire set of questions would need to be repeated for each of the three SPF-SIG priorities. It also requires a somewhat time-intensive scoring procedure that is to at least some extent subjective. For these reasons, we instead choose to adapt (with permission) the community resources and readiness tool developed for the Connecticut SPF-SIG. That instrument incorporates many of the concepts and content from the Tri-Ethnic Research Center tool, but uses a primarily close-ended format that can be self-administered by the respondents. Reports from Connecticut suggest that it has been used with good success in both their grantee and non-grantee communities.

Vermont SPF-SIG community grantees may, of course, collect other capacity information in addition to the information collected with the assessment tool. In fact, that will almost certainly happen as the grantee organization proceeds through its capacity building and planning steps. Communities that are interested in using the Tri-Ethnic Research Center tool in addition to the Vermont tool may certainly do so. Keep in mind, however, the level of burden placed on your respondents.

Conducting Your Community Resources and Readiness Assessment

To conduct the community readiness assessment in your community, you will first need to identify a set of key informants who you will ask to complete the survey. The goal is to have between 4 and 7 people complete the survey. An initial list of 10 possible respondents will likely be sufficient. It will be important to get responses from key informants who are either:

- well connected to, or have knowledge of, existing substance abuse prevention efforts and/or other community services in the community, or
- are in some way involved in community affairs or leadership, and therefore likely to have good sense of how residents feel about issues such as substance use.

Persons from both of these groups should be included to help ensure there is a broad mix of key informants. The box at the right lists a number of community organizations and groups from which key informants might be drawn. For community grantees that are coalitions, it is likely that certain members of your coalition will be appropriate informants. If you have difficulty identifying key informants, the ADAP Prevention Consultant for your area may be able to suggest persons who would be appropriate. If you still are having trouble, please contact the state evaluator (kcahill@vdh.state.vt.us) for assistance.

Where to find key informants.....

- Substance use prevention or treatment agencies
- Health care
- Public health
- Schools
- School boards
- College and universities
- Law enforcement
- Local government
- Opinion leaders
- Media
- Faith-based organizations
- Youth-serving organizations
- Other community-based organizations
- Local businesses or agencies that employ young adults

Once you have identified a list of key informants, contact them and ask if they would be willing to have you mail or deliver the survey to them. Even having talked in person to the respondents, it will be useful to include a brief cover letter with the survey with instructions and some background information. An example cover letter is included in your folder. It will be helpful to put a “due date” on the surveys and to provide reminders to respondents who have not turned in their survey by the due date. Once you have collected 4 to 7 completed surveys, read through them and follow up with the respondents if there is significant missing information or you need clarification about a response.

Both the grantee communities and the state evaluator will participate in the analysis of the survey data. We suggest that the community project director and/or local evaluator read

through each completed survey once and write down any questions or initial comments on each respondent's answers. Next, reread the open-ended questions for each survey and make notes of consistent themes, especially about the strengths and challenges the community faces. Then please make copies of all of the surveys and your comments on consistent themes in the open-ended questions and send them to the state Evaluation Coordinator (Katy Cahill, ADAP, 108 Cherry St., Burlington, VT 05401). Please also make sure that the surveys do not have personally identifying information. The state evaluation team will review the open-ended survey questions as well as the local evaluation team's comments on consistent themes. The state evaluation team will take the lead on a quantitative data analysis (e.g., calculating average item scores for your community, along with statewide averages) and will share a final report of the analysis with each grantee. Ideally, both the process of cooperating with key informants to conduct the assessment and the analytical report of the results will prove useful to the leadership of your coalition or organization.

Resources

- Edwards, R.W., Jumper-Thurman, P., Plested, B.A., Oetting, E.R., & Swanson, L. (2000). Community readiness: From research to practice. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28, 291-307.
- Plested, B.A., et al (1998). Community Readiness: A tool for effective community-based prevention. *The Prevention Researcher*, Volume 5(2): 5-7. (Excerpt)
- Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research. Community Readiness Questions.
- Waller, M. & Flewelling, R. (unpublished). Capacity Assessment Review. Internal working document.

Other Materials

- Vermont SPF-SIG Community Resources and Readiness Assessment tool (original plus 10 copies).
- Sample cover letter to include with surveys.