

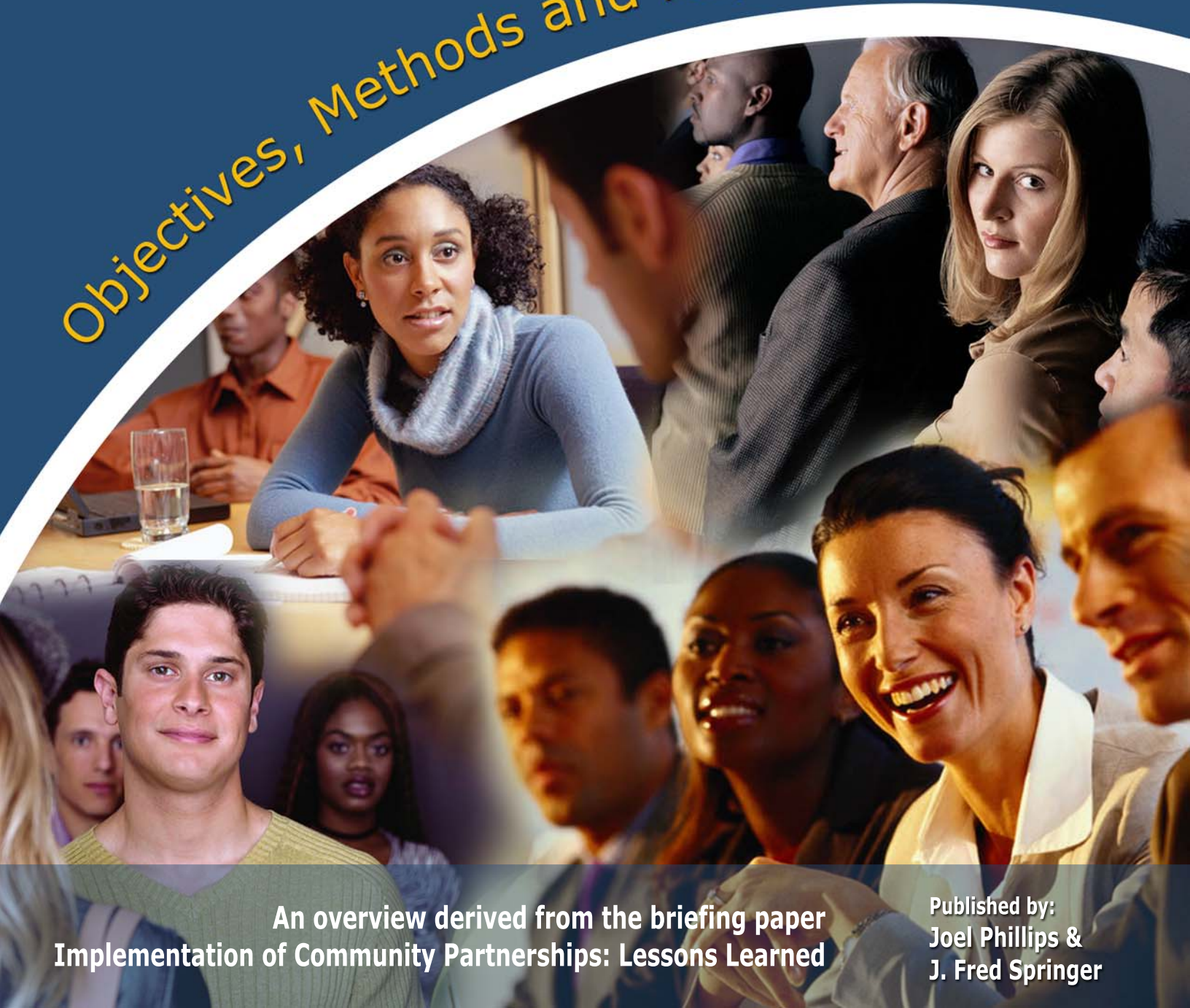


EVALUATION • MANAGEMENT • TRAINING

COALITION:

Lessons Learned

Objectives, Methods and Keys to Success



An overview derived from the briefing paper
Implementation of Community Partnerships: Lessons Learned

Published by:
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An excerpt from

IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: LESSONS LEARNED

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July 1997

The last decade has seen an emphasis on initiatives designed to increase the capacity of local communities to address social problems through community-wide collective action. This movement has gained momentum through a variety of recent trends, including increased recognition of the importance of public-private partnerships to address complex social problems, the recognition that social problems are embedded in local conditions, and recognition of the need for more coordination in a fragmented helping services system.

The current interest in encouraging communitywide collective action is manifest in numerous public and private funding initiatives (Action, 12/92; Join Together, 5/92; Klitzner, et al, 5/93; Join Together, 1996). The Community Partnership Demonstration Program funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) is one of the most ambitious of these initiatives, funding close to 250 community interventions for five year grant periods (Roehl et al, 5/95). More recently, CSAP has broadened the scope of community-wide collaboration to include multi-jurisdictional representation. However, the goals remain the same - coordination and collaboration is seen as appropriate mechanisms to increase efficiency in planning and delivery of ATOD services.

This proliferation of coalition-based community initiatives has provided an unprecedented opportunity to learn about how to effectively organize and implement community interventions that can significantly impact local conditions (Springer & Phillips, 1994). Some of the funding programs, notably the CSAP demonstration, have required evaluation of funded programs providing extensive documentation of this large base of experience. Fully utilizing this data will be an extended undertaking, and this brief discussion of lessons is one step in that direction. The lessons here do not represent a full and systematic review of the complete documentary record on coalition-based community interventions in recent years. Neither does space or format permit discussion of specific examples or evidence for the broad lessons offered here. The review does represent a summary of recurring findings and themes from more than a dozen evaluations of coalition-based interventions the authors have conducted, and from participation or review of evaluation activities and findings in many more. These lessons are offered to stimulate discussion of practical issues of program design and implementation.

If you are interested in setting up an online coalition or collaborative project site, please visit *MyPrevention* and create your own online community at no-cost.

- Create your own social network coalition site
- Blog on issues involving coalition development
- Read best practice publications
- Meet others from around the county who use coalitions for community prevention

Go to www.MyPrevention.org
and click the "Groups" button for more details.



LESSON ONE

Unclear purpose is a major impediment to successful collective action by voluntary coalitions.

LESSON ONE: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Formulate and agree upon a clear statement of purpose.

METHODS



- Identify outcomes that -- if achieved -- would make this a successful coalition.
- Circulate purpose statement and get buy-in from all members.

KEYS



- Keep it simple and brief.
- Focus on achievable outcomes.
- Allow statement to change/adapt.
- Make purposes realistic and achievable.

LESSON TWO

Membership configuration must be appropriate to shared purpose and strategy.

LESSON TWO: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Assess membership capacity pursuant to coalition goals.

METHODS



- Identify coalition needs and resources.
- Inventory current assets and skills.
- Identify gaps -- what is needed?
- Match recruitment process to needs.

KEYS



- Understand that coalition success is dependent on having the appropriate involvement of individuals and organizations.
- “Appropriate involvement” depends on agreement concerning coalition outcomes.

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LESSON THREE

Maintaining active participation depends on meeting the participation needs of members.

LESSON THREE: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Make the collaborative experience a meaningful one for the participants.

METHODS



- Assess satisfaction periodically.
- Identify needs of participants and determine how well these are being met.

KEYS



- Use task force/committee structures.
- Focus on single topic and have timelines and end dates.
- Maintain few action-oriented committees involving appropriate members.

LESSON FOUR

Inappropriate organization can impede collective action by voluntary coalitions.

LESSON FOUR: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



- Streamline operational procedures.

METHODS



- Identify just what is needed to operate effectively.

KEYS



- Don't develop burdensome procedures.
- Minimize time spent on governance issues.
- Minimize standing committee structure.

LESSON FIVE

Planning is important, but it must be adapted to coalition purpose, organization, and membership.

LESSON FIVE: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Develop a sensible (doable) strategic plan or blueprint.

METHODS



- Identify key milestones (ie., objectives, personnel, and timelines).
- Assess key points of success.

KEYS



- Focus on achievable steps/accomplishments.
- Understand resources needed to achieve goals.
- Effective planning must begin with clear understanding of the specific goal-related problems.

LESSON SIX

Leadership can take different forms, but it is essential.

LESSON SIX: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Ensure coalition has effective leadership.

METHODS



- Assess leadership style best suited to needs of coalition.

KEYS



- Evolving coalition needs may require changes in leadership styles.
- Strong leadership is desirable.

LESSON SEVEN

Coalitions often gravitate toward strategies that are not sufficient to the nature of the problem.

LESSON SEVEN: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Coalition must align strategies to desired outcomes.

METHODS



- Assess the logic of achieving the intended outcomes by the proposed strategy(ies).

KEYS



- Coalition must have clear, achievable outcomes.
- Strategies must be appropriate to achieve the outcomes.
- Strategies must be achievable within resource and time constraints.
- Strategies must be measurable.

LESSON EIGHT

Facilitating community-based collective action requires appropriate roles for paid staff.

LESSON EIGHT: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Ensure coalition has effective leadership.

METHODS



- Coalition must make maximum use of limited financial and paid staff support.

KEYS



- Identify roles of volunteers and paid staff.
- Identify greatest personnel needs and associated costs by level of affordability.

LESSON NINE

Effective collective action requires a willingness to change in order to achieve results.

LESSON NINE: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Coalitions must engage in serious and ongoing self-examination.

METHODS



- Assess progress and determine strengths and weaknesses of coalition efforts in a systematic fashion.

KEYS



- Examine both operational procedures and strategic approaches before making changes.
- The ability and flexibility to change is critical to success of coalition.

LESSON TEN

Clear purpose, appropriate planning, and a commitment to results will produce effective collective action.

LESSON TEN: ACTION STEPS

OBJECTIVE



Clear, outcome-based purposes and a focus on appropriate strategy and programmatic actions are the cornerstone of effective coalitions.

METHODS



- Build in the time for honest self-reflection on progress.
- Determine what works and what does not, and then make the necessary changes.

KEYS



- “Failing to plan is planning to fail.”