

2. Exploration & Engagement

Purpose:

Assess the potential match between community problem areas and community resources in order to make a go or no-go decision.

Activities:

- Hold an initial meeting or meetings with identified stakeholders in order to identify:
 - Key informants who can tell you about the community's interest in and history of suicide prevention.
 - Issues associated with previous suicide prevention efforts.
 - People, coalitions, organizations, and community groups to participate in community planning.
 - Possible champions.
 - Community resources.
 - Grant potential.
 - Ideas for conducting the Initial Research and Environmental Scan.
 - Ideas for approaching certain organizations and people who might have concerns or be potential champions.
 - Groups who meet regularly who might be willing during a meeting to introduce the subject and provide volunteers to participate in implementation.
 - Ideas for integrating or coordinating efforts with related initiatives and programs (e.g., local mental health coalition.)
- Decide whether or not to proceed with community planning.
- Develop a plan of approach for community planning.

Resources/Input:

- Specific problems areas to be explored
- Plan of approach for exploration and engagement
- Suicide Statistics
- Grants
- Other community initiatives and programs
- Community contacts

Results/Output:

- Areas of need to be addressed by the community
- Plan of approach for community planning
- Resources to participate in community planning

Description:

In this phase, you will execute your plan for contacting and engaging other stakeholders in the suicide prevention coalition. When meeting with each person identified in the previous step, some of the questions you may wish to ask are:

- What has happened related to suicide and suicide prevention in the community?
- Who was involved?
- What challenges, roadblocks and successes happened in the past?
- How interested would the community be in implementing suicide prevention?
- Who (people, coalitions, organizations, community groups, institutions) should be involved in future suicide prevention efforts?
- Who might champion such efforts?
- What issues or objections would these people have to being involved?
- What resources does the community have access to (e.g., community mental health center, active drug prevention coalition, related grants)?
- What is the best way to approach these people and groups (e.g., phone, introductory email from a person they know, attend a meeting that they attend)?
- What groups meet regularly who might be willing during a meeting to introduce the subject and provide volunteers to participate in implementation?
- Would they be willing to participate in a planning session?

Coalitions report that it is important to involve each person at the best time, and not always from the beginning. For example, mental health professionals may prefer to be involved during planning while business leaders may more likely stay engaged if involved after an action plan has been developed.

You may decide to hold a pre-planning meeting with your stakeholders. The following activities are recommended for a pre-planning meeting:

- Introductions of all meeting attendees, including those who were invited but were unable to attend.
- Review of the community's demographic and suicide data.
- Share the identified problem areas and explain how they were identified.
- Ask for their input regarding other problem areas
- Share any knowledge gained when talking to community stakeholders.
- Provide information on Concept Mapping and how it might be useful. Decide if Concept Mapping is appropriate for planning.
- Agree on the date, time and location of the planning meeting.
- Identify activities that could be included in the planning meeting.
- Decide how and by whom the planning agenda will be developed.
- Identify a timeline for community mobilization.

Your timeline will depend on the availability of stakeholders and the urgency of your problem. You may have a different timeline for different problem areas. For example, if a local university student recently took her life, you could create a very short timeline to

mobilize to address that specific problem area while creating a longer timeline to address other problem areas.

Once community stakeholders are engaged, you are ready to proceed with community planning.