
PLANNING THE WORK

Who are the right people for the job?

Building a Team

Once your Steering Committee has researched and documented the drug threat, start putting together the Working Group. Reach out into the community to find dedicated people willing to volunteer their time and energy for the next 12–18 months. Use every method of communication available: make phone calls, send e-mail messages, write letters, approach potential partners at meetings, parties, and other gatherings throughout the community. Diplomacy, networking skills, and a persuasive personal style will be valuable assets at this stage. Remember, you are asking for a significant commitment of time, energy, and expertise. Identify people you can count on to do the job. (See appendix B for a sample invitation letter to prospective participants.)

When building the Working Group, recruit allies who are not only knowledgeable about substance abuse issues, but who also have the drive and the wherewithal to help move the program forward. Think about the types of partners who will make the greatest contribution and best represent the community. Developing a successful Major Cities Initiative requires getting the involvement of the right people for the right reasons and for the right amount of time. Look for individuals who are committed and action oriented—people who know their field and have a history of getting things done.

Think strategically: Who has the special skills that are vital to the initiative? What organizations, public or private, should be involved? Consider the role each potential team member will play, as well as the specific experience or contacts that he or she will bring to the table. Ideally, the group should include primarily individuals with decision-making power or who have influence in the community, such as local government officials, community leaders, educators, business leaders, directors of agencies receiving substance-abuse funds, and heads of anti-drug coalitions. (See appendix C for a suggested list of individuals or groups whose participation you should seek.)

The stronger and more diverse the Working Group, the better your chances of making progress. However, always be clear as to the purpose for engaging specific individuals, and stay flexible. As the program evolves, a re-evaluation of the group's membership may be appropriate.

KEY POINTS

- Put together a Working Group of dedicated individuals willing to volunteer their time and energy for 12–18 months.
 - Seek the participation of action-oriented people from various sectors of the community, including:
 - treatment
 - prevention
 - law enforcement
 - schools
 - coalitions
 - local government
 - public health and safety
 - business
 - youth
 - parents
 - faith community
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How do participants design and carry out their action plans?

Developing a Strategy

When 40–50 individuals have committed to serving in the Working Group, bring all the participants together for a meeting to begin the work of the initiative. Ultimately, the objective is to draw on the collective brainpower of the group to develop a series of action plans—comprehensive, detailed, written strategies that spell out key objectives and methods for achieving them. (Appendix D offers a sample agenda for the strategy development session.)

Many of the Working Group members will meet each other for the first time at the Strategy Development session; for most of them, the meeting will be an intense learning experience. The basic goals of the session are to inform participants of the full scope and severity of the drug threat, and to spur them toward coordinated, constructive action. Make sure the program includes speakers who can present information about the drug problem from the perspectives of prevention, intervention, treatment, and law enforcement.

Begin the meeting with a strategic overview. Present findings from existing reports that specifically address local drug use, then broaden the discussion to include your state's drug strategy and issues covered in the National Drug Control Strategy. The President's 2005 Strategy, for instance, describes the Government's three-pronged approach to the drug threat:⁷

- stopping drug use before it starts, through education and action
- healing America's drug users by providing treatment resources where they are needed
- disrupting the market by attacking the economic foundation of the drug trade

Next, turn your attention to the local drug threat. Present the results of the Steering Committee's drug-threat analysis, allowing time for speakers to discuss how drug use affects the community in a variety of ways. Ask attendees to evaluate areas of need and what resources are available for addressing them.

Roughly the first half of the meeting should be devoted to education and review of the threat. The second half is for developing action plans. Break the group into three or four Task Forces organized by specialty (i.e., prevention, treatment, criminal justice, supply reduction). Ask each group to identify salient aspects of the drug threat and to create action plans for improving the community's response to those issues.

When developing strategies, the key is to think SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, tangible. Urge participants to focus on defining activities that will address the threat at various points along the drug-use continuum, from disrupting the supply of drugs to improving prevention, intervention, and treatment for those who use them.

The Task Forces should develop action plans that are simple and feasible, and that logically will result in a measurable reduction in substance abuse within 12–18 months. Each group should prepare a written strategy with clearly defined objectives, activities, and intended outcomes. (See appendix E for a guide to the elements of an effective action plan.)

Naturally, you hope the strategies devised through your program will have a lasting effect. It is best, however, to concentrate on what realistically can be accomplished within a finite and agreed-upon timeframe. Avoid grand, open-ended, or overly ambitious plans that are unlikely to get off the ground. However, strive also to go

⁷ The slide set "National Drug Strategy Overview," created in Microsoft PowerPoint®, can help you present this information. The document is available online at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/prevent/strategy.html>

beyond short-term or purely “feel good” projects. A single walkathon, for instance, may temporarily raise drug awareness but will have minimal impact on drug use.⁸

For each action plan, all Task Force members should be aware of *who* is doing *what*, as well as *when*, *where*, and *how* the plan will be carried out. It must also be clear which data sources should be monitored to assess the impact of specific actions. For example, if your city has logged a high number of emergency room visits associated with the use of ecstasy (MDMA) in nightclubs, the supply-reduction Task Force might put together a training program for club bouncers. The impact of this initiative could be measured by the change in emergency room admissions, or by the number of drug arrests in the city’s nightclub districts.

After allowing plenty of time for brainstorming, call the full Working Group back together and ask each Task Force to present its action plans. Encourage discussion, but keep in mind that the goal is consensus and generating broad support for each plan. For this to happen, all participants must understand exactly what each Task Force plans to do and which individuals will be doing the work. The role of the Steering Committee in the process is not to approve or reject proposals, but to provide direction and evaluation, and to explore ways for the full group to assist the Task Forces.

When all Task Forces have presented their plans, start bringing the session to a close. Thank everyone, congratulate the group on a promising launch, then wrap up with a discussion of next steps. When should the members get together again? What are the most urgent agenda items? Experience shows that regular meetings of the Steering Committee and Task Forces help maintain focus and ensure program success. Establish a meeting timetable early in the process, and make every effort to stick to it.

By the end of the meeting, everyone should be clear on what to do in the weeks and months ahead. The wheels of the initiative have been set in motion. The challenge now is to keep them on track and moving in the right direction.

⁸ The slide set “Making a Local Drug Strategy,” created in Microsoft PowerPoint®, can help in the development of an action plan. The document is available online at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/prevent/strategy.html>

KEY POINTS

- Bring all participants together for a strategy development session.
 - At the meeting, arrange for presentations about the impact of drug use from the perspectives of prevention, intervention, treatment, and criminal justice.
 - Review the current National Drug Control Strategy and relevant municipal documents or statewide strategies.
 - Present the findings of your local drug-threat assessment.
 - Break the group into three or four Task Forces to forge action plans that are SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and tangible.
 - Develop plans that clearly delineate *who* will do *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how*.
 - Establish a timetable for regular meetings.
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Dollars and Sense: Money is Not Always the Answer

America spends significant amounts of money on fighting drugs. Billions of dollars in government and private funds flow to States, cities, and towns every year to support anti-drug activities. In fiscal year 2004 alone, the Federal budget included more than \$3.3 billion for State and local drug programs.⁹

While money and other resources are crucial to the success of a Major Cities Initiative, *more* is not necessarily *better*. Do not assume that the new program will require new funding, or that simply allocating more dollars to the drug problem will make it go away. You may also question the effectiveness or prioritization of some funding.

A better solution is to bring governments and communities together to look at their existing *resources* and identify ways to use them more efficiently. Most communities, in fact, already receive more funding than people generally realize. This is because it is not always immediately obvious how much is flowing to individual projects through the various funding streams.

When taking account of your community's resources, keep in mind that monetary support is only one resource, and often not the most important one. As the work of your community's Major Cities Initiative gets underway, be sure to broaden the notion of *resources* to include priceless intangibles such as human capital, expertise, and commitment. Also look for private partners who have an interest in supporting a drug-free norm in the community.

Funding, when put to good use, can always help; in some cases, new sources of funding may be essential. However, competition over limited resources can be a distraction that interferes with efforts to unite the community.

Before you decide that the project requires new funding, ask yourself: How can we better leverage our resources and make the most of what we already have? Would more money really promote collaboration and significantly improve our ability to push back against drug abuse?

⁹This includes approximately \$355 million for state and local law-enforcement activities; \$1.8 billion in block grants for substance-abuse prevention and treatment; \$618 million in discretionary grants for prevention and treatment programs; \$594.4 million for continued support of school-based drug programs; and \$38.1 million for drug courts.