

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AS MECHANISM TO REDUCE HEALTH DISPARITIES

REACH

METRO BOSTON WORKING GROUPS

The Experience of the Metro Boston Haitian REACH 2010 HIV Coalition

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CDC's REACH 2010 Initiative Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health

- Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Goal to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health by the year 2010.
- Two-phased demonstration project that supports **community coalitions** in designing, implementing, and evaluating community-driven strategies to eliminate health disparities.
- During a 12-month planning phase, REACH 2010 grantees use local data to develop a community action plan.

The Metropolitan Boston Haitian REACH 2010 HIV Coalition Goals (by 2007)

- Goal 1: Expose approx. 18,000 or 25% of Haitians in the metro Boston area to HIV/AIDS preventive education.
- Goal 2: Increase the capacity of leaders in the Haitian community to effectively provide HIV prevention messages to the Haitian community.
- Goal 3: Increase the capacity of non-Haitian providers to effectively provide HIV prevention services to the Haitian community.
- Goal 4: Maintain momentum of Metro Boston Haitian REACH 2010 Coalition and enhance collaboration of key people involved in HIV prevention service provision.

The Metropolitan Boston Haitian REACH 2010 HIV Coalition Members

- Composed of seven community based organizations and two health centers:
 - Center for Community Health, Education & Research, Inc. (Lead Organization)
 - Association of Haitian Women in Boston
 - Caribbean U-Turn
 - Dorchester Nazarene Compassionate Center, Inc.
 - Haitian American Public Health Initiative
 - Haitian Multi-Service Center
 - Mass Community Health Services
 - Cambridge Health Alliance
 - Children's AIDS Project (Boston Medical Center)

Why Is It So Difficult To Collaborate?

- History of distrust influences both individual and community practices
- No history of effective collaboration
- A competitive mindset: cooperating often means losing
- Passive-aggressive behaviors related to internalized racism and oppression
- Social interactions are heavily influenced by power, class, skin color and the continual search for superiority
- Effective collaboration requires unlearning non-cooperative behaviors and new practices of collective action

How do we comprehend what to do?

- Three concepts with same foundation:
 - Community Capacity: the collective ability of a community to respond to external and internal stresses, to create and take advantage of opportunities, and to meet the needs of members.
 - Capacity Building: a range of activities by which individuals, groups and organizations improve their capacity to achieve sustainable positive change in their community. Capacity in this context includes awareness, skills, knowledge, motivation, commitment and confidence.
 - Social Capital: The degree of social cohesion which exists in communities. It refers to the quality of interaction between actors which facilitates cooperation and coordination for public good.

Assessing our collective deficiencies

- Our HIV Programs were not comprehensive
- Duplication of services, resources and efforts
- Marginalization of staff and customers in program design and implementation
- No meaningful communication between providers
- Competing for same resources
- Distrust, distrust and distrust

Moving from dissatisfaction to actions

- Making a conscious effort to foster:
 - Trust, understanding and respect among partners
 - Openness in decision making, information sharing and communication
 - Developing mutual accountability
 - Starting to build on community ownership
 - Developing new structures of interactions

How Did We Do It?

THE CAPACITY BUILDING LEARNING NETWORK

- Monthly discussion between Executive Directors and Program managers of all partner organizations on collaborative practices:
 - Social conflicts; social and individual trust
 - Competitive framework and coalition building
 - Mental models and cooperative practices
 - The development of a comprehensive inclusive agenda binding all partners

The Capacity Building Learning Network : Plan Of Action

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ON COMMUNITY BUILDING:

- Seven focus groups across Greater Boston
- Scenarios Planning with community leaders
- Future Search Planning with a cross section of the community in developing the action plan
- Moving from a reactive to proactive action
- Communication to community radios and TVs of the plan for action
- Developing of island of expertise across coalition members

Capacity Building And Sustainable Plan: Targeted Outcomes

- Inclusion of all institutions in community health and community building
- The development of a comprehensive plan bridging social and economic sectors, and generations around Greater Boston
- Creating new mechanisms of interactions and involvement across the community
- The development of resources from within to solve major community issues

Decision Making: Walk The Talk

- Decision made by consensus after reasonable discussion. When consensus can not be reached, a ¾ vote is required
- Programmatic decisions rest at working groups for recommendations and adopted by coalition.
- Open floor for all members to bring critical issues to the coalition
- Issues of sustainability are discussed at the Capacity Learning Group
- Administrative and financial oversight with the lead organization

Our Results

- A comprehensive program for HIV education in the Greater Boston area
- Consistent messaging to multiple populations, multiple geographies
- Increasing the level of awareness and involvement on HIV issues at the population
- Greater openness of HIV discussion at all level of the population including churches and medias
- A tested infrastructure to sharpen our intervention in order to reach expected outcomes
- An established structure for community dialogue and community responsiveness

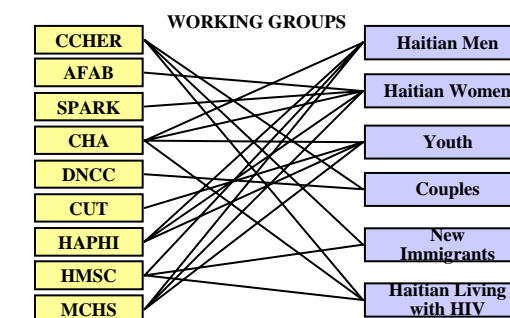
How Did We Do It?

CREATING NEW MECHANISMS OF INTERACTION

- Coordination and facilitation through the lead agency
- The Working Group Models
- Decision making, information sharing
- Communication, communication...
- On going evaluation on practices and outcomes
 - Are we making a difference?

Working Groups

- The Working Groups were organized as Inter-Agency collaborations of providers serving similar clients.
- Develop HIV preventive education content and intervention strategies.
- Develop new relationships and joint practices
- Shifting from individual to group accountability
- Changing the conversation to: what's possible?



COMMUNICATION COMMUNICATION COMMUNICATION

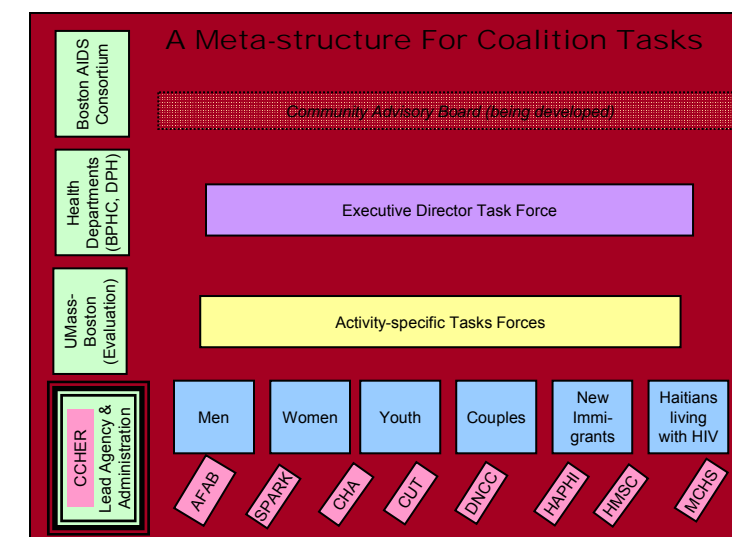
- Working group meetings
- Working group mailing lists
- Quarterly meetings
- Monthly Capacity Building meeting
- Multiple phone conversations
- Play day (once a year)
- Training, training, training
- Reflective practices (What's going on?)

Our Challenges

- There Are So Many Issues So Few Resources
 - Other Health Disparities (Diabetes, CVD,)
 - Youth Development And Economic Development...
- Community Empowerment Necessitates A Level Of Transparency And Openness Difficult To Initiate And Maintain
- Increasing Expectations From Community Members For Comprehensive Action
- Moving From Understanding Non Cooperative Behaviors To Create New Practices Of Collaboration Is A Daunting Task
- Not Able To Meet Increasing Expectations

Structures Of Implementation

- Different layers of involvement
 - Individual organization
 - Population-Specific Working Group
 - Activity-Specific Task Force (i.e. Media Task Force)
 - Executive Director Task Force (a.k.a. Capacity Building Task Force)
- Developing community ownership
 - Community Advisory Board (In progress)
 - Media Leaders Involvement



LESSONS LEARNED

- Community building has to be incorporated in new way of doing business
- Collaboration does enhance program design and implementation
- Good understanding and discussion of power structure will strengthen the effectiveness of the coalition
- Multi-layered participants from organization facilitate program implementation and program planning
- Involvement community members keeps the coalition focused on its purpose and not on processes of interaction
- Working community infrastructure inspires to new actions and to greater accountability

PRESENTED AT THE 2005 NATIONAL HIV PREVENTION CONFERENCE IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA
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