



S T R A T E G Y G R O U P

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mobilizing Communities for Change

Introduction

Communities in our nation are devastated by the effects of violence, poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, and poor health outcomes. Currently, national, state and local organizations are strategizing to develop the best solutions to these problems, and are making progress in reaching some of the most burdened communities. However, the need is enormous, which creates a demand for even more innovative solutions to problems in communities and neighborhoods that are difficult to reach.

The causes and effects of inadequate institutional resources and tools are often far too complicated for most communities to grapple alone. Richard Hofrichter¹ suggests that health is connected to quality of life and well-being; population health outcomes are primarily the result of social and political forces, not lifestyles or behavior; and an accumulation of negative social conditions and lack of fundamental resources contribute to health inequities, and include economic and social insecurity, racial and gender inequality, lack of participation and influence in society, unfavorable conditions during childhood, absence of quality and affordable housing, unhealthy conditions in the workplace and lack of control over the work process, toxic environments, and inequitable distribution of public goods.

Strategy Group (SG) is proposing a targeted community mobilization process that ensures that indigenous leaders are available to help plan and implement community-wide improvement. The process involves (a) arranging financial and human resources, (b) engaging and empowering residents and their leaders to do things themselves (in other words “community empowerment”), and (c) coaching leaders through a strategic action planning, data collection, data assessment, and evaluation process tailored for their community. This process provides the best chance for success in high-risk communities and for the identification of appropriate prevention strategies. The climate is ripe and reveals a significant role for SG in the area of intentional community organizing. Targeting communities that bear the heaviest burdens requires a hands-on approach to coaching, training, leadership development, and technical assistance.

Why Strategy Group (SG)?

SG has over 20 years of experience implementing *policy, systems and environmental (PSE)* change strategies in local communities. SG has formed a team that will work alongside and coach local grown leaders to build individual/collective capacities, while functioning as part of a community coalition. SG will do the necessary reconnaissance and ground work to initiate the process and identify key players in the respective communities. SG will also engage in assessment and observation research activities, which will involve a community participatory approach to identifying problems. The outcomes will include indigenous community coalitions, which function to create systemic and population-based changes in their communities addressing issues related to the prevention of violence, poverty,

¹ Tackling Health Inequities through Public Health Practice: A Handbook for Action. Richard Hofrichter, 2007

unemployment, poor health outcomes, and other concerns. In addition, the community coalitions will be poised to apply for and receive funding for implementation of relevant strategies and programming.

Summary of Experience

- *Georgia Ethnic Health Network (GEHN)* was a project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through the American Lung Association. SG's mission was to develop leadership in diverse communities and to build partnerships for sustainability and inclusiveness, and advocate for issues adversely impacting communities. SG facilitated a process whereby Asian, Latino & African American leaders could dialogue around working together to combat common problems. GEHN had three primary goals: 1) build and strengthen the capacity of Georgia's ethnic communities; 2) increase community awareness and coalition participation; 3) identify and train grassroots leaders from various ethnic communities to sustain the work of a coalition. Ultimately, SG facilitated a process by which ethnically diverse organizations and communities would craft strategic plans over multiple years, and provided guidance to communities by using complete community assessment profiles. More importantly, SG culminated the process with a statewide ethnic health summit including translation in multiple languages.

Lessons Learned: a) The lack of a long-term community plan weakened the coalition's ability to sustain its activities; b) a need to understand the complexity of communicating with diverse cultures and ethnic populations in one setting;

- In Atlanta, SG provided leadership needed to support *Hands on Atlanta- Community & Civic Engagement Initiatives* encompassing three departmental program goals: 1) service learning where SG designed and organized Hands on Atlanta's first Youth Summer Service Camp 2) issue education to assist with curriculum development on components of the AmeriCorps, National Youth Service Day, MLK, Jr. Service Summit and other designated civic engagement programming 3) youth/adult volunteerism and civic engagement through extensive collaboration with internal/external cross-organizational teams and volunteer networks. For example, SG helped identify and secure funding for an Enterprise Community Partners Inc. "Sustainable Communities" grant, which built resident/community partnerships to make Atlanta Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU) T, M&V ...livable and safe.

Lessons Learned: a) Building relationships with key corporations and foundations proved important to the community development equation; b) developing comprehensive training and knowledge transfer opportunities for volunteer leaders to enhance their capacity for impact.

- *Metropolitan Atlanta United Way: Smart Start Early Learning Division* contracted with SG in the *Cobb County Early Learning Community Based Partnerships (ELCBP) initiative*. The ELCBP focus was on ensuring that children are ready to succeed in school when they enter kindergarten by developing strategic partnerships to (1) engage parents in their child's early learning experience; (2) link families to needed social services; and, (3) build grassroots leadership to advocate for improvements in policy and systems that impact child outcomes. SG developed and implemented a resident and community-participatory approach to conducting a Community Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping for (2) ELCBP sites in Cobb County (Marietta – Franklin

Road, 30067 and Austell – Six Flags Drive, 30168). SG focused on building capacity of each site to perform by working collaboratively with United Way consultants, Smart Start-UWMA staff, Community Hub Coordinators and other partners to conduct a Community Needs Assessment and Asset Mapping for the above referenced sites. Outcomes were astonishing and different in both communities; where each had unique characteristics none related to the other. For example, in Franklin Road, SG engaged primarily Latino residents who needed translators and interpreters during focus group and community building sessions. SG conducted community analysis and assessments through an observational research approach in two communities in Cobb County using a compilation of existing data and statistics; secondary research findings; and an assessment of community resources (e.g. market studies, newspapers, directories, etc.)

Lessons Learned: a) Participants got lost in the shuffle because they were not empowered to take leadership roles in asset mapping process; b) SG underestimated the impact that language barriers would have on productivity and goals attainment during focus groups

- In West Virginia, SG was awarded a contract from the *West Virginia Department of Public Health* in 2008 targeting outreach to African American communities in McDowell and Kanawha counties. The overall purpose was to guide community mobilization strategies that organized coalitions primarily around the elimination of diabetes, obesity and other health disparities. Essentially, SG was able to simultaneously work to build community coalition capacity and address *CDC's REACH West Virginia grants program goals*. The community coalition building approach was implemented in four phases: initiation, assessment, strategy planning, and sustainability. The approach assured the following specific measureable outcomes: 1) increased awareness and coalition participation; 2) increased community problem assessment and solving ability; 3) trained and indigenous leadership structures; 4) clearly defined health indicator measures; 5) clearly defined linkages with existing resources; and 6) community action plans that are measurable, fundable and sustainable.

Lessons Learned: a) Public health practitioners cannot rebuild struggling communities without the human/financial support of corporate, church and medical industry partnerships. b) Do not begin a discussion about engaging thought leaders from within communities until there is a community/collaborative partnership established around improving quality of life.

The Need

What better way to describe community need than to reference some of the great work that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has done surrounding addressing social determinants of health. Social determinants are leading factors that help define what is wrong and/or needs to be fixed in communities.

²CDC suggests that health status in America is declining because of inequalities, which is exasperated by issues of poverty, low income potential, race, socioeconomic conditions and a number of other cross-connecting risk factors that produce inequitable health outcomes. Additionally, unemployment has its unique impact by not only ruining the lives of the people who has to endure it, but evoking fear among

² CDC Promoting Health Equity: A Resource to Help Communities Address Social Determinants of Health (2008)

those who have jobs. According to Nicholas Von Hoffman³, this type of fear cripples the mind to think it could be me next, so as to stop spending money on cars, houses, clothes or anything else. Greenstone & Looney⁴ (2011) says “ this fear that job losses will postpone prosperity by the remembrance of a century of depressions, recessions, slumps, panics, dips, slowdowns, busted bubbles and crashes, suggest that employment is slowest to recover.” The country needs to improve how it matches people looking for jobs with jobs they are suited for. Faster and better job matching has national economic benefits, reducing the waste of resources from prolonged unemployment and underemployment.

Lichter⁵ et al. suggests that America’s rural population continues to face disproportionately high poverty rates but also has become less geographically concentrated in high-poverty counties. The rural poor especially remain heavily concentrated in geographically isolated, economically depressed, and often forgotten regions of the country. These same rural communities grapple with finding strategies and successful approaches to community building, because without choices and resources people lack power to create positive change. Significant barriers plague communities that have disproportionate numbers of residents who are low SES and are disenfranchised. These same communities struggle to identify funding, support services and community programming that will help address their needs. Economic, cultural, and social influences play an important role when implementing prevention efforts among underserved populations. Factors e.g., educational attainment, income status, culture or language spoken are indicators that social and environmental conditions impact overall quality of life.

SG will assemble a skilled team of consultants focusing on delivering proven prevention strategies targeting underserved populations to address community deficiencies while considering their current levels of readiness. This team of professionals will bring a unique perspective and mix of culturally diverse competencies to help improve local outcomes. SG will seek to help bridge this gap by working directly with indigenous leaders, community and corporate leadership, policy makers, funding agencies, and public/human services organizations to ensure that high-risk communities are empowered; positioned for funding opportunities with strategies that are fundable and sustainable; are prepared to implement PSE changes at the local level; moreover, has increased awareness surrounding the issues via a method of knowledge transfer.

Community Mobilization Strategy

The community mobilization strategy will have an empowering effect on indigenous leaders in target high-risk communities around the US. SG will work with local leadership and organizations to build new coalition structures and/or refurbish existing ones. Since the mobilization effort cannot succeed without the participation of the resident leaders, we are employing intentional, community-based, participatory research approaches to empower, identify, and recruit/retain residents. Community leaders will engage in addressing targeted issues in their communities by promoting civic & corporate responsibility surrounding change. In addition, SG seeks to evoke vision among organizations and the resident leaders to sustain mobilization efforts for future campaigns.

³ Hoffman, N.V., The Nation: Jobless in America : Letters from the forgotten unemployed (February 2009)

⁴ Greenstone, M., Looney, A., Renewing Economically Distressed American Communities ; Winter 2011

⁵ Lichter, D.T, Johnson, K.M., The Changing Spatial Concentration of America’s Rural Poor Population; Rural Sociology 72 (3), 2007, pp. 331-358.

Community mobilization strategy includes the following six phases:

Phase 1: Intentional Community Organizing

Intentional community organizing, which includes coalition building and collaborative partnership development, will be one of the most intensive and carefully executed phases. SG will mediate meetings between key thought leaders, corporations, hospitals, churches and residents in the target community to form a community “**collaborative partnership**”. The collaborative partnership will be comprised of a diverse group of high-level leaders who have a stake in the target community. The collaborative partnership will become a group of stakeholders with a purpose of identifying human/financial capital needed to help support the target community.

SG will work with key contacts to enlist local grown leaders for leadership roles while establishing a “**community coalition**”. SG understands the importance of leadership and influence and for that reason, will work closely with the key contacts to identify indigenous leaders who have resident contingencies in their neighborhoods and/or hold significant power. These leaders will be encouraged to recruit other residents and lead meetings in the community. Some of the strategies will involve working with schools, businesses, healthcare centers, libraries, existing community organizations, churches, supermarkets/corner stores and in other settings to answer the question, “who are the natural leaders that others in this community listen to, respect and go to for answers?”

SG will facilitate multiple meetings either face-to-face, teleconference and via webinar. Technical assistance and consultation will identify best practices for organizing in communities, as well as ascertaining assets and barriers to leadership participation in the coalition/partnership development process. This phase also provides an opportunity for knowledge transfer as needed.

Phase 2 Asset-Based Community Development

Asset-based community development is a process by which coalition leaders will begin mapping key assets within the community by using a model developed by the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute at Northwestern University in Chicago. The tool was developed by two master practitioners (Mike Green and Henry Moore) who taught the notion that citizens are the primary asset and activators of assets in local communities. ABCD Institute utilizes tools to assess five categories of community assets: a) inquire about the skills, passions and experience of local residents, b) existing volunteer organizations and their networks, i.e. faith-based organizations, c) local institutions that might contribute to community empowerment, i.e. schools, libraries, parks and police stations, d) physical assets e.g. land, buildings and transportation use; and e) economic assets as in primary modes of bartering goods in the community and businesses. SG will ensure that capacity inventories and mapping tools are tailored for specific needs of each target community during the facilitation and development process.

Phase 3 Assessments: Data Analysis & Research

Assessment of community assets, its level of readiness and needs are important in this phase. Each community will be expected to work towards outcomes that highlight their greatest strengths in two project stages: Capacity building and an implementation period. SG will coach leaders through a process for community participatory dialogue around issues that have the greatest impact as evidenced by the data collected in assessments.

SG will develop an instrument that is a derivative of some of the existing national assessment tools. In addition, leaders will be encouraged to use several community assessment tools to evaluate community

assets and needs surrounding environmental and social determinants. In most high-risk communities, the social determinants will have a tremendous impact on how they prioritize and implement relevant environmental strategies affecting a target population. To help guide communities around these issues, SG will rely on some of the most notable work of national organizations surrounding this issue. For example, The Harlem Children's Zone, SeedCo, PolicyLink, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and the Enterprise Communities already have promising practices to learn from.

Phase 4 Community Action Planning

SG will ensure that community action plans are developed for each target community and their newly formed and/or existing coalitions in concert with the "collaborative partnership". During phases 1-3, many meetings and networks should have been formed and convened to reflect a diverse make up of individuals from the target communities. These formal/informal networks and groups are affected greatest by targeted community concerns and they are committed to seeing social, economic, educational and environmental changes happen. In addition, key stakeholders among the collaborative partnerships should be shaping up simultaneously.

SG will provide technical assistance to help coalitions clarify their mission and purpose in each community; develop objectives that address the question of how much impact does each neighborhood/community want to see regarding the elimination of identified negative impacts. The objectives will be written with clearly defined benchmarks to provide the baseline data that is needed for evaluation and assessment of goals attainment. Objectives will address tangible outcomes on individual and population levels. All community action plans will be reviewed for specific, measurable, accurate, reliable and time bound (SMART) objectives rationale and standards. SG will facilitate the process for each coalition to identify specific strategies that might highlight social, economic and environmental factors that need to be addressed in their communities. More importantly, these strategies will seek to address the social determinants affecting the target community when appropriate resources are available.

SG has recommended a "Four Steps" community action planning series:

- Step I- Clarify coalition mission/purpose
- Step II - Community SWOT analysis/evaluation
- Step III- Develop goals/objectives for addressing identified concerns
- Step IV- Review plan for SMART objective rationale and develop community strategies

The community action plan will identify action steps for each change (who is going to do what by when).

Knowledge Transfer & Training

SG will use a process of Knowledge Transfer to communicate from its consultants, to communities then back and forward within communities. Like knowledge management, knowledge transfer seeks to organize, create, capture or distribute knowledge and ensure its availability to its communities and leaders. SG will use technology and the internet as a communication tool rather than solely depending on a mere memorandum, an e-mail or a meeting to accomplish the knowledge transfer. SG will decode the complexity of communicating by (1) ensuring that knowledge resides in coalitions and its organizational structures using tools, tasks and their sub-networks and (2) SG will coordinate with existing national organizations and local resources utilizing webinars, conference calls, one/one consultations and neighborhood-based online trainings.

SG is recommending the following process while implementing a community-based knowledge transfer approach:

Process

- Identify key stakeholders within the communities
- Motivate them to share among each other best practices for community building
- Design a sharing mechanism to facilitate the transfer with their unique community
- SG will manage and help execute the knowledge transfer plan via web
- SG will measure effectiveness to ensure the transfer stays active
- Communities and leaders will apply and act on knowledge transferred

Phase 5 Evaluation & Sustainability

In this phase of the process, SG finalizes the evaluation protocol used to document the participation, effects of participation, processes, etc. of the community mobilization strategy. This step in the community action planning process will require that target communities re-assess their particular selection of PSE changes that will help them accomplish their goals. SG will ensure that each strategy identify specific PSE changes that primarily impact communities (i.e., new or modified community education programs in churches, schools or workplaces; policies and practices) or intervention elements to be sought or implemented (e.g., providing information and enhancing skills). In addition, during this phase, SG will rely on best practices and recommended community strategies published by national organizations, foundations and professional journals.

Sustainability

The rationale here is to ensure that all community coalitions have the necessary tools and access to resources that would help them sustain their work beyond the initial start-up. SG will coach leaders through a sound business model for managing grants, which includes identifying community organizations who can act as a fiscal agent, and developing long-term infrastructure from within the coalition to sustain momentum over time. SG will also assure that the community collaborative partnership develops a 3-5 years strategic plan impacting the target community.

Phase 6 Community/Neighborhood Impact Summit

SG will organize local “Community or Neighborhood Impact Summit” to help residents deepen their understanding of policy, systems and environmental change strategies surrounding targeted community concerns in high-risk populations. The Summit will invite guest speakers and subject matter experts who know how to reach the target community. Each community will culminate their community mobilization activities with a Summit, which is the kick-off for the “Implementation Phase”. In addition, the summit will become an avenue for raising awareness about community change goals and provide media advocacy opportunities for exposure.

Timelines (*per community*)

The capacity building phase is expected to take at least 1yr to complete. For example: components 1-3 are estimated to take four months with one lead SG consultant/staff assigned to the community. Components 4-5 will take approximately 6 months to complete with at least 2 SG consultants/staff involved in the strategic planning process. The final component 6 is the Community/Neighborhood Impact Summit and several SG staff will be participating along with invited speakers /guest needed for maximum knowledge transfer and media opportunities. The Community/Neighborhood Impact Summit should not be more than 1-2 days and does not require overnight stays by community residents.

Benefit to communities:

Level 1

Target community will receive 1 year of coaching and technical support from national experts in the fields of education, economic development, violence prevention, public health, community development/organizing and fundraising. The ultimate purpose is to build capacity and leadership to form a “collaborative partnership” and “community coalition” to address targeted concerns in underserved neighborhood “pockets”.

Level 2

Community/Neighborhood Impact Summit will essentially be a knowledge transfer event for local resident leaders and also a media event to kick-off the implementation of mobilization efforts in target community.

Level 3

Target community will begin 2nd year Implementation Phase. The goal is to ensure that significant human/financial resources are identified and set aside for this phase. SG suggests that funding goes directly to a local community organization positioned to act as fiscal agent. This should be a seed grant and/or discretionary non-competitive award and/or funds generated through efforts of the “collaborative partnership”.