INDIANA HEALTHY COMMUNITY INITIATIVE
6 KEY COMPONENTS OF BUILDING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Community Understanding

Creating a successful community initiative requires knowing who lives, works, and plays in the community, as well as what current organizations or groups are doing in the community already to improve quality of life. It is important to identify relevant data and information and look at key community health indicators to learn what changes or improvements should be focused on and will be accepted by both community leaders and citizens alike.

Take into consideration how large employers, schools, faith-based organizations, and other influential organizations or groups drive change in the community. Also look at what community amenities, such as farmers markets, bike paths, golf courses, art events, etc. your community has.

Key indicator examples (not a comprehensive list):

- Population size
- Demographics (age, gender, race)
- Poverty rate
- Median household income
- Life expectancy and death rates
- Disease rates (cancer, heart disease, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, obesity)

- Infant mortality
- Unemployment rate
- Opioid/substance use rates
- Air pollution (poor air quality days)
- Drinking water violations
- Food environment index
- Health care costs and access (number of

- primary care physicians and dentists)
- Transit ratings
- Educational attainment
- Violent crime
- Voter participation
- Smoking
- Immunization rates

Best Practice: Look at community health indicators and focus areas (there are many listed on the Community Resource List provided by WCI) and determine areas that need attention. Take an inventory of community amenities so that you are in a position to leverage what you already have. Seek input from citizen on what they envision as an ideal place to live, work, and play.

Data Driven Decisions

The Indiana Healthy Community initiative asks communities to identify goals and objectives and execute actions in order to successfully reach those goals. How do we know which goals to choose and which areas to focus on? Data! Not only do communities need to collect and assess data, but decisions made about improving community health or quality of life should be driven by that data. This ensures that goals are measurable and that communities can actually see tangible change over time.

Start off identifying key outcomes your community wants to see, determine the feasibility of change given the scope of the initiative, and then base your decision making on the projected success or failure of these outcomes. As you look at relevant data, try and determine the following for your initiative:

- How you will use the data
- Key success metrics for your goals
- What meaningful results would look like for your community

- How you will assess and evaluate your initiative with the data used
- What is already working well in your community and what opportunities are apparent
- What you see from the data that can most easily be changed
- What resources you have to help you prioritize goals based on the data

Best Practice: Utilize relevant data and identified community health needs to develop your initiative. Share data sources and research with the greater community to promote transparency and strengthen your case for community health improvement. Determine an evaluation strategy that measures outcomes of the community initiative, including citizen engagement and satisfaction, and communicate the results with citizens.

Leadership and Advocacy

The key to a successful community initiative is having the support and engagement of a diverse group of local leaders. These leaders should represent many different community sectors. These representatives will play crucial roles in developing and implementing your community initiative and determining each sector's mission to develop a shared vision will be an important step. Each community initiative will have a convener to guide and begin the process, and this looks different in each community. Leaders can come from the following community sectors (this is NOT a comprehensive list):

- School systems
- Employer groups
- Non-profit organizations
- Chambers of commerce
- Government offices
- Neighborhood associations
- Environmental groups
- Financial institutions

- Parks and recreation departments
- Community foundations
- Local law enforcement
- Economic development groups
- Hospitals and healthcare systems
- Fait-based organizations
- Civic and advocacy groups
- Public health departments

Best Practice: Engage diverse community sectors and ensure leaders are involved in each step of the community initiative process. Utilize leaders to help develop short and long-term goals that are feasible and will be supported by their various sectors.

Collective Vision and Action

Lasting impacts are created when communities incorporate improving health and quality of life into their strategic vision. Each leader and key stakeholder involved in your community initiative will have varying opinions on what are the most important issues to address, but if participants can come together to create a collective vision, communities will be more successful in their efforts. Considering what leaders and citizens envision for the community's future will help shape the strategic plan and allow for smooth collaboration. Try to include the following items when creating a collective vision and action plan:

- Community values, priorities, and aspirations
- How this initiative fits in with other initiatives or programs already occurring
- What strengths and resources those involved with your initiative already possess
- How workplaces tie into the larger community initiative (AchieveWELL companies)
- How participating leaders and organizations can tap into funding resources that may be needed to achieve goals

Best Practice: A collective vision is based off the common goals and strategies of diverse sectors in the community to inspire action. Tap into existing community resources and ensure all participants are working together to achieve the goals set by the initiative.

Citizen Involvement

In order to fully execute a community initiative, citizens serving existing coalitions, advocacy groups, and partnerships must be utilized. These individuals understand how their roles complement and support one another in making your community a better place to live, work and play. One of the key focus areas is workplaces. Most citizens in the community are tied to one or more workplaces, and since citizens spend the majority of their time at work, this is a great way to involve citizens in your efforts.

Leveraging the perspectives from many different citizens ensures that your community initiative does indeed reflect the needs and desires of the community at large. Citizens should be considered your "community experts". Citizens are also more likely to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for implementing change in the community of they have a part in developing goals and objectives.

Best Practice: Be sure that participating citizens feel empowered to share their input and help in the decision-making process. Citizens should be put in roles that best fit their skills and talents and it is important that these roles and expectations are openly communicated with them. Self-organizing groups understand that their diverse roles complement and support other groups in working toward their shared vision.

Effective Communication

Developing an effective communication plan to disseminate information on your community initiative is critical to its success. A great strategy for delivering consistent, recognizable information, is to brand your initiative so that citizens know where the information is coming from. It is also very important to use a multi-channel approach to ensure you are reaching the largest audience possible. Try to incorporate some of the effective communication strategies below:

- Develop communications in different languages to reach more specific populations in your community
- Consider the health literacy of your community when addressing health outcomes and factors
- Determine methods of communication that will reach all or most of your community:
    - Newspaper, brochures, other print materials
    - Radio commercials or television broadcasts
    - Public events and forums
    - Social media posts from participating partners
    - Billboards and PSAs

Best Practice: Brand your community initiative and send regular communications through a variety of different channels. Ask for feedback from recipients and try to incorporate suggestions into your communication strategy to reach more people in the most effective way possible.