



Comprehensive Plan Section 3 – Community Input Process

3.1 Outreach

The initial workplan for the South King County Community Network planning effort focused extensively on community outreach through public meetings - with the aim of making the planning process truly grass-roots and reaching people not normally involved in shaping community affairs.

In this effort, the Network interviewed nearly 30 key informants, held 8 general community meetings - one in each school district within the Network boundaries - and identified a series of focus groups to achieve inclusion of groups who generally are under-represented in community meetings: low income persons, elderly persons, persons of color and persons with limited English speaking capacity, persons with disabilities and youth.

To publicize the planning process and encourage community participation, the Network mailed meeting notices which contained introductory information on the planning process to approximately 1500 persons. The recipients of the flyer included:

- Key community contacts identified by Network Board members;
- A mailing list for South King County zip codes provided by the King County Community Mobilization Against Substance Abuse - a list which includes members of community and youth coalitions, businesses, human service providers and police;
- Pastors of all churches in the South King County area - a list provided by the Church Council of Greater Seattle;
- Lay participants in the Virtues Project - a non-denominational parenting strategy workshop series sponsored by the Church Council of Greater Seattle and local area churches;
- PTSA contacts and principals in every elementary, middle and high school in the eight school districts;
- Superintendents of each of the eight school districts;
- Mayors, council members and planning staff for every municipality within the Network boundaries;
- Tribal leaders from the Muckleshoot Tribe;
- Key contacts within ethnic minority communities;
- Local press outlets within and bordering the Network's boundaries.

This distribution list was also used for subsequent mailings conducted by the Network - supplemented by lists of persons who participated in Network meetings since that time.

Despite both mail and in-person/phone contacts to encourage participation in the community meetings, attendance at the meetings was poor. A total of just over 110 persons attended the 8 initial planning meetings. In addition, the persons who did attend the meetings were by and large service providers or

school personnel. The goal of reaching grassroots community members evaded the Network in this initial outreach.

Recognizing that the Network was not reaching its goal, the Planning Committee revised its outreach strategy and began a concentrated effort to link with existing community coalitions addressing youth issues in each of the Network’s school districts. In choosing the coalitions to consult, the Planning Committee targeted those which:

- Had broad community representation;
- Had a focus on one or more of the prioritized problems facing communities (i.e. youth substance abuse, youth violence, child abuse/neglect, domestic violence, youth suicide and school drop-out);
- Had a capacity to examine risk and protective factors;
- And were committed to developing strong partnerships in service of youth and families.

The coalitions chosen included:

Auburn	Auburn Youth 2000
Enumclaw	Enumclaw Youth Task Force
Federal Way	Federal Way Family Network
Highline	none identified to date
Kent	Kent Community Council for At-Risk Children and Youth
Renton	Renton Communities in Schools
South Central	Readiness to Learn Coalition
Tahoma	Maple Valley Communities that Care Coalition

To the extent possible, meetings were scheduled with these coalitions during 1995 for input on choosing priority problems and risk/protective factors. Meetings were also scheduled in early 1996 in order to gain input on preferred strategies for addressing those problems.

In addition to seeking input of coalitions that were primarily composed of adults concerned with youth and family issues, the Network prioritized seeking input directly from youth. In this effort, meetings were held with youth in each school district - typically through a combination of late night programs, recreation programs and classroom settings. In these meetings, youth participated in a somewhat shortened version of the risk and protective factor discussion which was presented at community meetings, and provided input on priority problems facing them. This aspect of the community input plan proved to be critically important in targeting the Network’s priorities - since it was on the basis of strong youth input that substance abuse was included as a priority problem by the Network.

3.2 Involvement of communities - successes and gaps

Successes In the Outreach Plan

- The Network did begin to build good connections with local coalitions within the Network boundaries - and through these contacts was able to address concerns about the Network’s planning and begin a dialogue about future collaboration.
- Youth were strongly represented in the community input gained by the Network in prioritizing the problems it will address.

- The Network was able to gain some media coverage of its community meetings - though this remains an area that needs substantial work.

Gaps in the Outreach Plan

The Network was not able to substantially reach the "person on the street" for community input. This level of input will likely only be received as the Network develops strong strategies for reaching people in existing group and community meetings - an intensity of effort not possible within its current organization.

- The Network was not able to effectively reach ethnic minority communities for input. In the second phase of planning, particular focus was placed on one-on-one key informant interviews with ethnic minority community members because of the inability, despite repeated contacts, to convene focus groups within ethnic minority communities.
- Work with community coalitions remains at the "presentation and response" level. There is not an integrated approach to joint ventures and sponsorships of community change efforts.
- The Network continues to have a low profile in the community generally. Questions about the end purpose of publicizing the Network, its role in the community and how best to seek visibility will need to be resolved before the Network is able to develop a strong community outreach and publicity component.

3.3 Recommendations for Continued Work

Based on the experience of the Network to date, some recommendations for continued work in developing a strong community outreach component include:

- Continue to work in concert with community-based coalitions in identifying and supporting change at the community level.
- Seek ways to more fully integrate community coalition members in the work of coalitions and vice-versa. Strategies to achieve this might include:
 - Requesting representation from community coalitions on the Board, on Board committees, and work groups; and conversely
 - Requesting for Network Board members at least ex-officio membership in local community coalitions.
- Increase youth representation directly with the Network.
- Increase the diversity of Board membership - and thus representation of and ties to diverse sectors of the community.
- Implement a regular press outreach plan focusing on small community presses.
- Implement distribution of a regular update to community groups and institutions that produce newsletters or have posting boards (like libraries and schools).
- Sponsor community meetings or events that are aimed at educating the public about high priority network goals (for example, parenting fun nights) - rather than about the Network itself.
- Consider how Network Board member roles can increase connection to community coalitions and interests - and how this representation is linked to Network workplans.
- Consider developing a staffing pattern that can focus on expanding representation of the Network in community coalitions and community change efforts.

