Community mobilization is the act of engaging all sectors of a community in a community-wide prevention effort. (Western CAPT)

Community mobilization is the movement of community members from dormancy in preexisting groups or potential in yet-to-be formed groups toward action. - Henry Ford

Mobilizing communities to change is a challenging endeavor that will require dedicated commitment and the realization that change is a difficult process for many people. Before beginning the mobilization process it is important to build trust, give the community an opportunity to give and share ideas and to ensure that the new coalition does not threaten or duplicate present efforts. Many different groups and people will ultimately be involved in this process so it is also important that the coalition know that the community will expect action and results.

During the early stages of coalition development, it is important to assess the mobilization capacity of the community to determine what steps are necessary to enhance a community’s mobilization capacity. A publication developed by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), entitled Drug Abuse Prevention and Community Readiness: Training Facilitators Manual, is available to assist in understanding the community mobilization process.

**Getting Started**

Certain key elements are needed when mobilization of a community by a coalition begins. Key elements needed include:

- Engaging concerned people in the community - These are the people that are ready for change and are willing to work to make it happen.
- Identifying emerging leaders - These are the people that will inspire and lead the group.
- A common vision of the end results.
- Involvement by people who respect that they may have different opinions and varied ways to achieve goals, but recognize that they all want the same outcome.
- Leaders who encourage, build and share work recognition.
- Time.

Community mobilization typically begins with a meeting of everyone who has a stake in the change process such as families, schools, employers, government, education providers, health and family support services, libraries, religious, civic and business groups. The mobilization process can start with a formal group meeting or a simple gathering with a group of
people interested in a common cause. The leader may be elected or appointed. Regardless of how they start, these early meetings should be process oriented and democratic. Subcommittees may ultimately be formed and the concrete foundation formed by these groups will help bring out the need needed change in the community.

To be successful, stakeholders need a leader’s help and time to get to know and trust one another. This requires flexibility, creativity, the ability to compromise, a willingness to acknowledge collaboration and change are never easy. Frequent contact is necessary to help everyone stay interested and involved.

**Maintaining Mobilization Momentum**

To keep mobilization efforts moving, it is necessary to identify anything that may make the momentum stop. Mobilization initiatives that continue over time usually have a vision and a set of clearly stated goals. This vision is a shared statement of what an initiatives success will look like. This provides a unified focus for all the present and future stakeholders.

Mobilization leaders must understand that they should work on educating and nurturing new leaders. This educating and nurturing helps to reduce burnout as well as ensure that these future leaders or not excluded or alienated thereby losing potential contributions they would have made. Allowing stakeholders to make decisions and celebrating accomplishment along the way assists in maintaining mobilization momentum.

**Mobilization Barriers**

If the mobilization is to be maintained, it must be honest, clear, factual, and timely. Focus always must be on communication of needs and accomplishments to the community. Other mobilization barriers include:

- Turf issues - Address them as soon as they are identified.
- Not keeping the community power structure informed.
- Not being conscious of the racial, ethnic or social barriers of the community.
- Tolerance - Some believe that there will always be substance abuse in a community and that some level is acceptable.
- Denial - There are communities whose residents state there is no drug problem present in their community. These are the hardest communities in which to generate support for a coalition.

When launching a new program or mobilizing the public to action on a community need, an effective, comprehensive social marketing plan must be developed. This generates greater support and involvement in programs and activities that address the need. A new program must be recognized and perceived as an asset to the community.

Barbara L. White, Ph.D., says an effective plan will help those who are concerned contribute to the creation of positive attitudes where none exist. She also notes that it will intensify existing positive attitudes, convert existing negative attitudes and sometimes neutralize persistent negative attitudes.

**Florida Strategic Prevention Framework**

The ultimate outcome of mobilizing a community to action for this purpose is to help build a successful coalition to prevent drug use. There are seven steps that have been identified by the Strategic Prevention Framework to build a successful Prevention Program.

- **Community Readiness and**
**Mobilization:** Is the community ready?

- **Needs Assessment:** What are the community’s greatest needs for prevention?
- **Prioritizing:** What risk and protective factors are the priorities?
- **Resource Assessment:** What resources exist in the community that could assist with the risk and protective factors that have prioritized?
- **Focusing efforts:** What will be the focus of the prevention efforts?
- **Best Practices:** What prevention strategies have been researched and are considered effective?
- **Evaluation:** How will the prevention program be evaluated?

**Florida Prevention System**

The mission of Florida’s Coordinated Prevention Initiative is to create and maintain an integrated prevention framework in which Floridians collaborate through local communities, key state agencies, and organizations to implement efficient, appropriately applied evidence-based substance abuse prevention across the life span.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) awarded Florida a five-year grant that started in 2004. With this grant, the Florida Strategic Prevention Alliance will complete the development of integrated State and community-level strategic processes. Both levels will be supported with the assistance of epidemiology, community readiness, resource assessment, strategic planning and organizational development resources for evidence-based programming, and a Web-based performance data system that tracks both coalition and program
activities.

A key issue in the 2001 *Florida Prevention System* indicates that we must move toward coordinated strategies such as community coalitions and parent groups rather than depending on individual agency responses. Successful collaboration has occurred in Florida especially in building drug prevention coalitions, therefore it is important to continue to mobilize, maintain, and sustain coalitions as they continue to effect change throughout their communities. The Florida Strategic Prevention Framework goes a long way towards helping to ensure that this occurs.

**Useful Links**

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America  
www.cadca.org

Community Partnership Institute  

Creative Partnership for Prevention  
www.cpprev.org

Families and Work Institute  
www.familiesandwork.org

National Centers for the Application of Prevention Technologies  
www.captus.org

Rebuilding Communities  
www.aecf.org/rci

Robert Wood Johnson’s Substance Abuse Resource Center  
www.substanceabuse.rwjf.org

**References**

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies, *Building a Successful Prevention Program: Step 1 Community Readiness and Mobilization*.  
http://casat.unr.edu/bestpractices/commread.htm, 8/05.


http://www.familiesandwork.org/forums, 9/05.


Ohio State University. *Factsheet: Mobilizing the Community*,  
http://ohioline.osu.edu/bc-fact/0010.html 9/05.