

A Briefing Paper:

IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
LESSONS LEARNED

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JUNE 1997

IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: LESSONS LEARNED

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The last decade has seen an emphasis on initiatives designed to increase the capacity of local communities to address social problems through community-wide collective action. This movement has gained momentum through a variety of recent trends, including increased recognition of the importance of public-private partnerships to address complex social problems, the recognition that social problems are embedded in local conditions, and recognition of the need for more coordination in a fragmented helping services system.

The current interest in encouraging community-wide collective action is manifest in numerous public and private funding initiatives (Action, 12/92; Join Together, 5/92; Klitzner, et al, 5/93; Join Together, 1996). The Community Partnership Demonstration Program funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) is one of the most ambitious of these initiatives, funding close to 250 community interventions for five year grant periods (Roehl et al, 5/95). More recently, CSAP has broadened the scope of community-wide collaboration to include multi-jurisdictional representation. However, the goals remain the same — coordination and collaboration is seen as appropriate mechanisms to increase efficiency in planning and delivery of ATOD services.

This proliferation of coalition-based community initiatives has provided an unprecedented opportunity to learn about how to effectively organize and implement community interventions that can significantly impact local conditions (Springer & Phillips, 1994). Some of the funding programs, notably the CSAP demonstration, have required evaluation of funded programs providing extensive documentation of this large base of experience. Fully utilizing this data will be an extended undertaking, and this brief discussion of lessons is one step in that direction. The lessons here do not represent a full and systematic review of the complete documentary record on coalition-based community interventions in recent years. Neither does space or format permit discussion of specific examples or evidence for the broad lessons offered here. The review does represent a summary of recurring findings and themes from more than a dozen evaluations of coalition-based interventions the authors have conducted, and from participation or review of evaluation activities and findings in many more. These lessons are offered to stimulate discussion of practical issues of program design and implementation.