



The Safety Net Works Initiative: Examining the role of the community coalition in strengthening neighborhoods



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Introduction

Safety Net Works (SNW) is a state-sponsored initiative designed to promote collaboration among local community groups with the goals of preventing youth violence and fostering youth development. Seventeen Illinois communities, including 12 in Chicago, were originally selected in 2008; each having a lead agency that coordinates a SNW coalition to provide direct services to at-risk individuals ages 10 to 24. This report introduces the premise behind the community coalition model on which Safety Net Works was conceived, summarizes the initiative's activities and services, and considers the extent to which the coalition approach employed contributed to the goals of the initiative.

Background

Safety Net Works is an initiative of the Governor's Office grounded in the community coalition model, designed to promote coordination and collaboration and make efficient use of limited community resources.¹

Launched in spring 2008, the initiative brings state and community resources together to help youth and young adults to enhance their opportunities for positive development into healthy and productive adulthood. A total of 17 sites were awarded grant funding during the first year of implementation, including 14 in Cook County, and sites in Decatur, Rockford, and East St. Louis. Overall coordination of the program resides within the Illinois Department of Human Services, but SNW was driven at the local level by a broad community coalition organized within each of the target communities.

Each Safety Net Works site was charged with implementing self-identified action strategies tailored to community needs. The model is designed to include youth in all planning and implementation activities. Program sites were expected to include existing community services and initiatives, and use SNW resources to broaden and enhance current strategies.

This report offers a brief review of the community coalition model and summarizes the information gathered from the sites in preparation for next year of programming. Also presented are findings from a series of telephone interviews with coalition leaders and partners.

The Community Coalition Model

The Community Coalition Model was developed in the late 1980s in response to the crack cocaine epidemic as a way to reduce the use of the drug in communities.² Community coalitions provide infrastructure to support planning and services that address specific community concerns. They are primarily used to convene community

¹ Adapted from CADCA. Retrieved on December 22, 2009 at http://www.cadca.org/start_coalition.

² Ibid.

leaders and partners and to provide leadership, a clear decision-making structure, and definition of roles, fiscal accountability, and training.

Coalitions bring together many facets of a community—parents, teachers, police, prosecutors, health providers, faith-based organizations, business and civic leaders, elected officials, young people and concerned citizens. The goal of the coalition is to connect multiple sectors of the community in a comprehensive approach, to use resources efficiently, and to increase protective factors and decrease risk factors that contribute to drug use, crime, and violence.³ At its deepest theoretical premise, the coalition model assumes that by altering the community system (including community norms, values, and service infrastructure) widespread incremental changes in behavior among large populations may be produced.

From a practical perspective, the coalition engages in “indirect services,” or activities such as community education and awareness campaigns, community needs assessments, data infrastructure development and data sharing protocols, resource sharing, and coordinated service delivery systems that will improve community-level outcomes. Coalitions seek to increase broad-scale pro-social outcomes, such as increased high school graduation rates or crime reduction, and work to reduce risk factors, such as drug use and gang affiliation.

SNW uses the community coalition approach to identify and implement violence prevention and youth development action strategies and ensure that existing state and community supports are involved as needed and appropriate. The next section provides a breakdown of required activities that cut across all SNW sites.

SNW site components

SNW incorporates one community-based organization to lead and coordinate activities and to convene and support community coalition partners. Clients may enter the program as referrals from other agencies headed by coalition members, through court mandates, or as walk-ins. Existing community services coordinated at the local level include youth services/positive youth development, out-of-school programs, juvenile justice programs, educational services, sports, recreational, and social programs, child welfare, economic development opportunities, substance abuse prevention activities, employment services, physical and mental health services; and domestic violence prevention and intervention services.

The goals of SNW are to:

- Engage communities in comprehensive, coordinated youth violence prevention activities through a coalition approach that involves state-funded human services providers and non-traditional community-based organizations and/or informal groups.

³ Drug Strategies. (2001). Assessing Community Coalitions. Retrieved on December 22, 2009 at <http://www.drugstrategies.com/acrobat/CommCoal.pdf>.

- Address a wide range of individual, family, and community factors that keep young people from reaching their full potential by providing services, interventions, and supports that will build healthy environments that allow youth to thrive.
- Promote youth engagement and leadership in all aspects of the initiative.

Coalition sites must:

1. Convene a local coalition

Assembly of a core membership of a local coalition must include at least one school and one faith-based organization. Community participation in the coalition will ensure local capability to identify community needs, develop and implement priority action strategies; and coordinate SNW in the community.

The coalition should have representatives from a broad spectrum of organizations. Expertise within the coalition should include, but is not limited to, education, community organizing, youth services/positive youth development, out-of-school programs, juvenile justice programs, law enforcement, child welfare services, economic development opportunities, substance abuse prevention activities, employment services, physical and mental health services, and domestic violence prevention and intervention services.

Coalition members may include, but are not limited to, representatives from:

- State-funded service providers, including representatives from all relevant state-funded drug and violence prevention, public health, economic development, child welfare, and youth service providers.
- Community-based agencies and groups, including non-state-funded community-based groups that have youth development or community safety as a primary goal and focus of activity.
- Local governments, schools, law enforcement agencies, and public health and municipal/county government agencies, including parks and recreation departments.
- Community members at-large, including representatives from neighborhood councils, neighborhood watch organizations or other neighborhood groups.
- Families and youth, including parents, caregivers, and youth leaders in the community.
- Business and commerce, including representatives from local businesses and corporations operating in the community.

2. Identify a targeted community area.

Communities taking part in the Safety Net Works initiative fell within a pre-selected community area listed in an application framework. Coalitions requested funding for a designated Chicago community area, city, town, or counties, or as a specific neighborhood within a targeted community. They were required to provide

information describing why the targeted neighborhood within a community was selected. The organizations were asked to describe experiences that demonstrated the ability to work successfully with coalition members and coordinate activities within the targeted community. Organizations also were required to demonstrate how the areas targeted for the initiative would show measurable reductions in youth violence and improvements in indicators of positive youth development.

3. Develop objectives, related priority action strategies, and outcome measures based on community-identified needs.

Strategies were required to include:

- Parent- and family-based strategies designed to improve family relations.
- Social-cognitive strategies that enhance positive social interactions, teach non-violent conflict resolution, and establish or strengthen nonviolent beliefs.
- Mentoring strategies that provide young people with caring, non-judgmental, supportive role models.
- Economic, vocational, and educational strategies that link young people with educational, training, and job opportunities, to ensure that any youth who has been, or is at risk of suspension or expulsion from school be directed to alternative programs and activities, with a special focus on helping youth, and possibly young adults, obtain a high school diploma.
- Community-oriented safety strategies that protect and provide for the safety of young people in their communities, such as neighborhood patrols, crisis intervention, or improvement of police community relations.

The coalition work plan had to identify coalition objectives, actions, and measurable outcomes for each of the strategies.

4. Identify lead coordinating organization.

The coalition site was required to provide a signed agreement describing participation and roles of coalition members and stating that coalition members would collaborate with the applicant organization. The applicant organization coordinated and facilitated all coalition's activities and fulfilled all programmatic and fiscal reporting requirements, including the distribution of sub-grantee funding to coalition partners.

5. Develop a line-item budget and detailed budget justification for the local Safety Net Works Initiative.

Budgets included:

- A full-time Safety Net Works local coordinator to help plan and implement the initiative in the targeted community;
- Sub-contract funds used to support implementation of the priority action strategies developed by the coalition.

- Line-item budgets and detailed budget justifications of coalition partners subcontracted to implement particular coalition strategies.

Common elements within the coalition sites

Along with contracting with a provider to conduct direct services to youth and young adults, coalition partners were required to engage in a number of activities to forge new partnerships and to strengthen the communities in which their clients live, including:

- Networking and convening partners
- Education and public awareness
- Service system access and expansion
- Youth leadership and engagement
- Community advocacy and support

The next section presents examples of how sites implemented the various requirements of the Safety Net Works model.

Networking and convening partners

Austin

Coalition partners in Austin brought together community organizations, youth associations, churches, victim advocates, and individual residents to discuss the pressing issues facing their neighborhood and offer a platform for the partners to be heard. The gathering was designed to forge relationships between these previously disparate stakeholders in their community.

Cicero

The Cicero Youth Task Force (CYTF) Coalition collaborates with Cicero Police Department, the Cicero Gang Tactical Unit, the Town of Cicero, and human service providers to work on strategies related to violence prevention. The CYTF had an ongoing networking agenda, including attending and presenting at Town of Cicero events, and inviting other agencies to present to the larger coalition for information and resource sharing. Additionally, the CYTF created a “Fellowship Program” with 40 youth and 20 parents trained and integrated into various committees and projects designed to improve the outlook of the community.

East St. Louis

The East St. Louis Coalition focused on partnerships related to employment training and employment. The coalition developed formal partnerships with local carpenters’ unions to support employment and to facilitate apprenticeships. Additionally, the coalition established building maintenance training programs with local businesses. As a result of

these partnerships and networking with the business community, more than 70 youth were hired into full-time positions.

Brighton Park

The Brighton Park Coalition employed various networking and partnership strategies. First, coalition partners worked with the Chicago Police Department on joint trainings and meetings to demonstrate solidarity between law enforcement and the community. Secondly, the coalition partnered with Central States Service Employment Redevelopment organization (SER)⁴ to provide on-site job training and placement for young adults in the neighborhood. Additionally, the coalition participated with “Put Illinois to Work Program” on training youth as outreach workers. Lastly, members of the Brighton Park Coalition reached out to specific community stakeholders and universities to attend SNW council meetings, to learn about the coalition’s activities and mission, and to explore potential resource sharing.

Education and public awareness

Humboldt Park

The Humboldt Park Coalition hosted a series of Youth Council Town Hall meetings to address issues of violence in their community. The meetings were meant to mobilize youth into making Humboldt Park a safer and more pleasant place to live. Among other accomplishments, the traction gained by the Town Hall meetings resulted in a group of 70 youth traveling by bus down to the State House in Springfield to advocate for youth services.

Rockford

The Rockford Coalition collaborated with the Winnebago County Health Department to hold a teen summit on tobacco prevention, sexual responsibility, and HIV prevention. These issues were identified by coalition partners as pressures faced by youth in the Rockford community. With the help of coalition youth organizers, the Rockford Coalition worked on four community garden projects and eight neighborhood clean-ups to help make Rockford a more aesthetically pleasing place to live.

Englewood

The Englewood Coalition developed a series of lead poisoning awareness workshops, and testing and treatment for community members. To facilitate greater participation from community members, the coalition hosted a summit with activities for children and youth, free lead screening, information, and advocacy. Additionally, coalition partners developed a domestic violence awareness and intervention series as a way to encourage community discussion about intimate partner violence.

⁴ To learn more about Central States SER see: <http://www.centralstatesser.org/>.

Little Village

Little Village Coalition members coordinated a school outreach program, with outreach workers located in four elementary schools to conduct voluntary after-school life skills programs. Additionally, the coalition coordinated a series of seminars on the Violence Intervention Program for youth to encourage non-violent communication and coping skills.

Service system access and expansion

Roseland

The Roseland Coalition served as the hub to coordinate wraparound services for clients from health and human services providers within the coalition. The Roseland Coalition executive director required service providers to keep case notes for housing in a central case management file for each client enrolled in services.

Decatur

The Decatur Coalition expanded its Truancy Court from middle school to the high school in an attempt to reduce the high number of school trancies. The coalition utilized neighborhood-based health and human services staff who were part of the coalition to share staff, volunteers and resources for frequently truant youth. These partners also sought out external funding to expand and enhance their activities.

Englewood

The Englewood Coalition developed a committee dedicated to expanding non-traditional education opportunities for high school-aged students. The committee also focused on identifying strategies to address the health and human service needs of youth in alternative education programs.

Youth leadership and engagement

SNW required coalition sites to hire a youth advocate or youth representative. These examples highlight some of the strategies coalitions employed over and above this program requirement.

Austin

The Austin Coalition supported a new initiative with 30 youth members called Young Creative Minds dedicated to increasing access to the arts and culture for Austin youth. The members of Young Creative Minds organized field trips to museums and weekly community service projects. Additionally, the Austin Coalition formed “Youth Councils” in different sections of Austin to serve as incubators for youth leadership. The councils met individually to coordinate safe and healthy events for teens in their neighborhood,

including a spelling bee, safe parties, a community garden, and civic learning projects. The councils also planned parties, talent shows, and peer-led workshops.

Cicero

The Cicero Coalition hired a youth intervention specialist to organize a Cicero Community Teen Health Initiative. The specialist also worked with coalition partners to develop a “Choose Respect” curriculum that was administered at the neighborhood youth center, in schools, and at community events. Additionally, the Cicero Coalition partnered with Notre Dame Non-profit Management Organization to offer a certificate program to promote professional development for 40 youth.⁵

Auburn-Gresham

The Auburn-Gresham Coalition hired a Youth Council representative to participate in SNW Coalition meetings and assist in the development of a youth ambassador program. This program was designed to engage youth in four local high schools to serve as the liaison between the SNW Coalition and the schools. The goal of the ambassador program was to ensure the voices of youth and their needs were heard by the coalition and their ideas were represented at coalition meetings. This program helped build stronger connections with the school and allowed students to find out about the programs and resources offered in the community.

Brighton Park

In addition to employing two youth to serve on the Coalition’s Board of Directors and participate in all aspects of the organizations decision-making process, the Brighton Park Coalition presented to youth in their schools about community programs and services. Coalition partners also drafted updates for publication in the school newsletters.

Community advocacy and support

Cicero

The Cicero Coalition conducted extensive parental outreach, and was successful in recruiting 87 parents for training as parent patrol in all 16 elementary schools in the community. Additionally, the coalition encouraged parental involvement with youth by offering “Through A Child’s Eyes” and “Family Focus” curriculums.⁶

⁵ The nonprofit executive programs include non-degree, certificate initiatives that seek to provide business leadership and managerial skills in a focused format. These programs typically run from five to 10 days, and offer skill building for success in the traditional workplace.

⁶ For more information on these curricula, see: <http://www.tace.info/through-a-childs-eyes/> and <http://www.family-focus.org/centers/cicero/index.htm> .

Roseland

The Roseland Coalition hired a community-capacity building consultant to work with coalition members to clarify ongoing goal-setting, strategic direction, and additional fundraising to sustain the work of the coalition. The consultant also focused on developing the skills of coalition members to be a consistent presence in the community as leaders in promoting community change.

Humboldt Park

The Humboldt Park Coalition worked with two local providers, Chicago Commons and Kelly Hall YMCA to host an inaugural Peace Concert in an effort to bring community members together in a positive environment. The coalition also developed six parent patrol groups in action planning around school safety, youth development, and community issues to encourage parental involvement and awareness of community risk factors.

Gage Park/Chicago Lawn

The Gage Park/Chicago Lawn Coalition conducted a community needs assessment and an organizational capacity assessment. Based on their community needs, they identified and established working relationships with local state-funded service providers and case management service providers. Additionally, the coalition concentrated on developing formal oversight and management protocols to assess changes in the community relevant to the work of the coalition with measurable program outcomes.

Safety Net Works site leadership interviews: summary of findings

To learn more about the different activities taking place within the various SNW sites, ICJIA developed a survey to administer to coalition leadership. Staff conducted 11 phone interviews, representing nine of the SNW Coalition sites. When necessary, staff clarified questions and asked additional questions to further explore participant responses.

The interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes. Subsequently, staff compiled the notes, identified salient themes, and pulled descriptive quotes. This section presents summaries for the responses to the survey questions.

1. What is your role or position with the SNW Coalition?

The majority of respondents (six) were program coordinators, with one executive director; two program directors; one site supervisor; and one chairman of the site's board of directors.

2. How long have you been working with the coalition?

The majority (eight) of the respondents have only been working with the coalition for a couple of years, while one respondent worked with site partners for six years.

3. Did your coalition exist prior to receiving a Safety Networks Grant?

Prior to the launch of the Safety Net Works Initiative, the State of Illinois funded local sites to participate in the Weed and Seen Initiative. Of the respondents, four of their coalitions were previously funded under this Initiative.

4. How did you develop the coalition's goals and objectives?

The goals and objectives were developed in a number of ways. The majority of sites (six) convened stakeholders in a strategic planning process. The process resulted in the development of site goals and objectives that were then paired up with the required activities listed on P. 5. One site hired an outside consultant to facilitate the meeting, but in most instances, the site leaders convened the meeting with service provider, community organizations, and community members. The overarching priority for all sites was to gather information that reflected the existing community assets and needs as indicated by those who would be impacted by the site's activities. The verbatim responses are:

- It began with the grant writing process. We also had focus groups. The focus groups helped us develop the goals. We continue with our monthly meeting keeping the goals and objectives in mind.
- Through a strategic planning sessions, with all the members of the coalition. We also had a work plan established by the SNW people. It was our tool kit.
- Our coalition updates the work plan and establishes how we are going to make the plan work for the community members. Each organization develops a "mini-work plan" and how they will contribute towards the overarching work plan.
- We went through an extensive strategic planning session and hired a consultant. The consultant worked with each individual organization in the coalition and applied their mission statement and goals and combined them to make a new set of goals and objectives. I think it worked well. We are taking the strongest points from each agency and making it one.
- Mainly through strategic action plan and through the tool kit distributed by DHS.
- With all of the executive directors and the staff. It was part of our work plan and objectives that SNW established for us as an agency. We followed the goals they set and developed the objectives from there.

- We knew the needs from the community. The members of service agencies in the neighborhoods let us know what the community was saying and the issues we needed to resolve.
- We had a community safety meeting. We had five working groups, and from those groups we developed the goals and objectives for our program.
- After we all came together and saw what we were bringing to the table, we considered the strengths of each agency before making goals and objectives for the SNW program.

5. How did you assess the needs of your community?

The needs of the community were driven by community leaders, residents, and organizations, either through a formal needs assessment or informal conversations. This process primarily took place during the planning phase, and was primarily driven by the perspective of the planning participants. The verbatim responses are:

- [Our community] has social service agencies and we work well with them and get stats from local areas to see the needs.
- We do a lot of canvassing and surveys. We do paper and face-to-face interviews to see what the community needs and what we can provide. We also go to neighborhood missions organized by other agencies.
- We go by the meetings held by school administrators, community members, and those that work with the community. We do a community-wide scan. We also provide teen health sessions and we hear what the issues are at these sessions. Another tool we've used is the Illinois Youth Survey, completed by students in 6th grade to high school.
- By asking community residents, leaders, and stakeholders. Also, most live and work in the community and see the needs.
- The individual organizations that are members of the coalition have already established its work and know the needs based on experience. They also provided a survey as part of our tool kit from DHS.
- Surveys and needs assessed based on experience.
- There has not been a formal assessment of our SNW. Our SNW is a baby and still in the beginning stages. But we know based on knowing the community and what community members tell us. We have monthly town hall meetings and go outside of the SNW plan and contact other non-funded programs like Safe Passage, and Parent Patrol.

- We did a community assessment and had focus groups and asked stakeholders about the community needs and gaps they have seen.
- Through the focus groups we were able to conduct a needs assessment. We also have Parent Patrol and they meet every other week. We have counselors in schools, both high school and elementary. The students that see the counselors are referred by the teacher or parents, the counselors see what is going on in the schools and report the needs to us.

6. To what extent did community residents participate in planning discussions?

Overall, respondents indicated that community residents were involved at every phase of planning, and continue to be involved in the implementation of the site initiatives. The verbatim responses are:

- We get a lot of participation from the community. We host forums in Spanish and English and host them for youth
- We partnered with [name of program]. They are a group of neighborhood residents that do beautification of the streets and such. And work in the neighborhood to keep it safe, and clean. We partnered with them since they were out on the street. We also open our meetings to the public and get participation that way.
- They participate by attending meetings and during meetings they are able to discuss needs. Also we have several members of the community that belong to a faith-based organization we have partnered with and participate through those groups.
- The youth and families participate during meetings and when they are provided services. We ask for their participation and want to hear their opinions.
- We conducted surveys, both paper and face-to-face to get youth to participate. Once they saw that their suggestions were made into programs or services they wanted to participate in our events.
- A lot of the information comes from the community. They look at the Safety Community forum as a means to participate and discuss where the community is going and if they want to "take it there." The community residents have a lot of forums. We also did informal focus groups through the parent patrol to see what issues the parents have. We found out that the issues were not what we expected, like violence and gangs, it was traffic and how other parents drive very fast, without paying attention to little kids crossing the streets.
- We have different groups. For example, women groups, these groups were established by the SNW and provide a forum for the community to discuss issues

- I think we have a handful of community members that participate in meetings. We developed subcommittees and have events that are organized and coordinated by the subcommittees. The smaller meetings give the community an opportunity to participate in any planning discussions and volunteer to be a part of it.
- The residents expressed the needs when they received direct services. We have open town hall meetings where the community can speak. The community is always encouraged to participate in the activities and help out in any way they can.
- Every step of the way – community residents have been involved in the plan.

7. To what extent did your coalition include youth in your planning discussions? Have youth been included since the project began?

Youth have been involved in all of the sites as contributors to the planning process, or as “consultants” to the development of the strategy. Sites varied in the ways in which youth were invited for participation. The verbatim responses are:

- We’ve always included youth and have always been intentional in our focus. We also have house ambassadors to run workshops at school and agencies.
- It’s a big portion of it. For example we want to do a summer kick-off and want to make a big youth event for the summer. Since we hired a youth worker we have made a lot of strides in creating more targeted activities for youth ages 12 – 24.
- Our youth are very active and we have a youth coordinator that’s very involved. The youth have been included in the planning process since the beginning; it was a requirement by the SNW grant.
- We involve youth in all aspects of SNW and reached out to them. We established a youth council at the start of SNW. We also hired a youth worker to concentrate on the issues related specifically to youth.
- Yes, they have participated since the beginning and have helped develop the survey. We have meetings in the early evening so that our youth can attend. So we want to make sure that they participate and feel integrated into the programs.
- In the first year we developed communication with youth and adults. It was the open communication lines that developed a lot of ideas for events and things like midnight basketball. The youth group leadership development coordinator lead groups on adult issues. She presents issues from a youth perspective. The second year we were required to hire a youth organizer. She is working out of two grants:

Public Allies and SNW. She coordinates the youth to get involved in the town hall meetings.

- I believe we are true collaboration because we want to hear from everyone in our community, from youth to elderly and everyone in between.
- Yes, youth have always been included in the planning process. We offer opportunities for youth to participate in meetings. They give us feedback based on the youth focus groups. Most of the youth we work with in this capacity are high school age.
- Youth are included in all aspects. They meet at least two times a month. They implement programs and get feedback from youth. Most of the youth we deal with are high school age.
- Youth are critical to our organization. The SNW is youth-driven. We have a youth council, they attend meetings and planning meetings and have created projects from those meetings. We often use our youth as a resource. They can identify the needs in the community and we ask them to organize events based on those needs.
- Youth attend the meetings. We also developed focus groups. The meetings are held around 6 p.m., a time where students are not in schools and the community is home from their jobs. The teens in the focus groups were asked to participate when they attended various events in the community
- Youth are a part of every step of the planning process. A youth representative is a standing member of the coalition meetings.

8. To what extent are there opportunities for coalition members to take leadership roles?

All respondents were quite adamant about the need for leadership from all coalition members and their continuing outreach to members to volunteer for greater responsibility within the coalition. The verbatim responses are:

- Always. We meet every third Friday of the month. People have the opportunity to chair a committee. Each committee has a chair, co-chair, etc. so there are always equal chances of enhancing the leadership skills. We also have mentoring and specific training for leaders held through DHS and our own.
- All the time, because we all work for different agencies and have different planned events. On that basis alone, we have to take up different leadership roles. We try to get to where everyone has an equal role as far as leadership goes.
- DHS [the Department of Human Services] seminars focusing on leadership development, as well as the seminars/trainings we offer on leadership

- I think all of the time, but it has to be encouraged. We address the sub grantees and get them motivated to work together. We get them involved with activities to get them involved, so they can know each other and feel that they *want* to help each other, because of the connections. People have opportunities to run work groups, and different meetings based on events and issues.
- I think its wide open, I know some council members and in speaking with them, they can work with several leaders in the community and offer trainings, both formal all day training and informally, like through mentoring.
- It's been increasing. As we begin to establish our agency/coalition, we begin to offer more opportunities for groups to expand. Since we started, they have expanded the services and types of meetings they have. For example, we offer leadership meetings every second Tuesday of the month.
- I think there are always opportunities for leaders to participate in meetings. Also, subcommittees that plan different events have opportunities to take a leadership role in the meetings and events. We also have leader trainings and sessions.
- We ask our teens to participate and they often take the leadership roles and direct events. As far as the coalition members are concerned, there are ample opportunities to be leaders. Some agencies have specialties like running a DV program and teaching about positive relationships. We asked that agency to lead a meeting and to lead events based on that. We each have our specialties and the leadership roles help the rest of us use those specialties.
- Coalition members are asked to participate at every chance during the meetings.
- Every partner has its niche and individual partners assume leadership roles.

9. In your opinion, do members think that coalition leaders follow through on their roles and responsibilities?

Nine of the respondents were very positive about the ways in which the coalition leaders hold themselves accountable and follow through on their roles and responsibilities. The verbatim responses are:

- Yes, because if they didn't we wouldn't see the number of people we see in each of our events.
- For the most part, there are times when things are turned in late, but it's hard to get people to follow up on things. I think it's something we can always improve.

- Participation is not 100 percent, because some groups are not the best in attendance. We have some businesses but not as many as we would like.
- It is a process. We have a new coalition. We do follow through on so many tasks and are spread really thin. But we try not to bite off more than we can chew. That's the only way we can show progress, otherwise several projects are left half done.
- I think so, because people are showing up. The meetings are getting bigger (more people are participating) and have expanded our individual organizations.
- I would say so. I know I drive them crazy. This is basically my job. I have to make sure that everyone is on task.
- Yeah, of course. We hold each other accountable and we are always keeping on a timeline. When we have a time frame in mind, we know we will follow through on issues and events.
- Yes, of course, we have great communication and especially through the parent patrols. They know that issues brought up will be brought to a meeting and discussed.
- Yeah, anecdotally speaking they are very happy with the meetings. There is buy-in. I communicate with them when we have meetings and let them know how they can help.
- Yes, as a matter of fact, they just told me that they are glad I followed through on program planning during a community meeting. During the winter meetings, I said I was going to hold a special meeting regarding summer programs for our youth. Well, just last week I had that meeting and two separate people at two separate times, came to me to tell me how happy they were that I followed through on program development for our youth this summer. Now, don't get me wrong, we still have a lot of planning to do, but it's a good step.
- Yes, everyone is accountable and responsible.

10. To what extent is there active participation from unpaid community leaders or community program administrators?

Many of the sites rely on volunteers to implement and sustain their efforts. Along with volunteers, sites have been strategic about partnering with existing efforts or organizations to maximize their impact. The verbatim responses are:

- Everyone is unpaid and, in fact, we came together because we do not have funding. Money is not an issue when it comes to participation. We work together to bring our resources and share them

- They play a huge part. The dynamic is good. We are the lead agency. We are located in a diverse section of the city. There are a lot of politics. We have a lot of people in our building, like the Weed & Seed, child services, and even a charter school. I think because of our proximity, we have a lot of active participation from various community organizations.
- We have a strong volunteer base and our organization before SNW existed had participation from the superintendent of the schools. We were very well known as CeaseFire.
- Most of our community partners are sub grantees. It is hard to ask members or agencies in the community to participate with out some sort of financial support. I guess it takes time, but most of the time we are trying to secure buy-in from other agency partners. Part of it has been the uncertainty of securing funds by our agency.
- We have volunteers, but the issue is not necessarily about money, it's about doing the work. We are asking people to participate when they have jobs and other responsibilities as well.
- We have participation from the Boys and Girls Club, and other partner agencies participate in our town hall meetings and sponsor activities.
- Safety Committee, CAPS, prison re-entry, Safe Passage. The best antidote to violence is to reduce the fear and create an environment where people can count on each other as a form of support. These non-funded partners help us do this.
- The Parent Patrol is completely made up of volunteers. They are required to call and give updates to us. They attend meetings, and voice issues they see in the streets. We also have other groups like [name of agencies]. These groups exist in our community and partner with us in various activities.
- I think it is minimal. I don't think it's as good as it could be. We are planning with the community leaders on events, but they are the same leaders from the same program. I wish we could expand on the types of agencies we partner with.
- There is more participation from youth, although they are not administrators, we see them as community leaders. We also have volunteers, and they have a strong participation in our programs. We have our coordinator meeting every third Wednesday of the month and our youth council meeting every second Thursday of the month. This is an excellent opportunity for the community to speak and discuss issues
- We average about 20 people during most of the meetings. At the meetings, we discuss how we need to relay the information to each other about service referrals

and sharing information about events. We are always thinking about our strategic plan, keeping that in focus while we work with each other. We meet about one time a month. We have seven subcontractors, but on average 20 people show up. I think that's a good sign that almost 13 people show up that are not being paid with SNW grant funding.

- The coalition has excellent participation from unpaid community leaders and program administrators. This is a result of excellent relationships.

11. To what extent are community business leaders involved in coalition planning or activities?

Overall, participation from business is mixed. As the responses demonstrate, some communities have secured food contributions or participation in specific events, but overall engaging business leaders on a consistent basis seems challenging. The verbatim responses are:

- We have a few business partners. Some of our partners are Target, restaurants and the [name of agency]. We would like to increase the cooperation of businesses in the community. Through our work with the chamber, we hope to network with local businesses.
- Due to proximity, we have a lot of connections and we get a lot of political sponsors.
- We have a lot of participation from local businesses like barber shops and beauty salons. Our barber and beauty salons play a big role in our projects. We just had a “rip the runway” event. We also have an African American funeral home where youth can do an apprenticeship. Other partners are car dealerships for jobs and various health providers that help us coordinate HIV-AIDS awareness, breast cancer awareness, and prostate cancer, too.
- We have been working with the [name of agency] business leaders, but the businesses are not plentiful in our neighborhoods. The program is still new and we are trying to secure “buy-in” from our sub-grantees. It’s hard to work together and try to expand to businesses at the same time. We are learning about each other and how we work. It’s still too early to work with outside groups.
- Actually we haven’t seen much of it from business leaders. Some businesses, mostly restaurants have sponsored activities, but mostly food. They do not necessarily attend meetings or anything like that, but they do donate food. And that’s important because without food, some people may not come, or stay.
- One of the sub-grantees is [name of agency]. They provide internships for youth in high school. We make sure they are not just sweeping floors and cleaning

- We really don't have much participation with community business leaders. We've had job fairs and invite the business to meetings too.
- Well it depends. When we have a summer event or programs, we have more interest from businesses. The business leader's participation is very limited. I wish we had more.
- It's hard to get them out to meetings because most of the businesses are small and work long hours. So we provide opportunities for them to speak about their issues in the community, the issues they see in our neighborhoods. We keep the businesses informed via e-mail and are trying to work with our local Chamber of Commerce. Our coalition is working on a project to develop a neighborhood directory of the businesses and the service agencies in our area. We started this project with the chamber and it has been hard to get off the ground because the chamber does not have a leader right now, and that position has been vacant for more than five months.
- We work with various businesses all the time. For example, during Halloween, we kicked off a safe passage where we asked local businesses to post signs that signal a safe route for our kids to take while going trick-or-treating.
- We also had a community summit in 2008 of local businesses to discuss the issues in the community.
- Community business leaders are very much involved with the coalition because they believe in investing in our youth.

12. How does your coalition inform the community of meetings, community resources, or activities?

The respondents were all very comfortable with their outreach efforts to the community. They are utilizing a number of different mechanisms, from email, to flyers, and neighborhood newspapers to "advertise" their activities. The verbatim responses are:

- We have a listserv and the secretary sends them out with information about several events. These go out almost daily. Also through the chamber of commerce, through the various resources they have. Of course there is always word-of-mouth, too.
- Through newsletters and email. We try to reach a lot of people and different people, too. The people are a bit "clique-y." They tend to stick with the same groups. We try to change them and have them mix with a different agency they have not worked with in the past.

- We have a partnership through the [name of agency], our neighborhood newspaper. We also make announcements via Facebook, e-mail, brochures, and text messages.
- It's been through email, but we know that a digital divide still exists, so we also use our phone bank and word-of-mouth. Actually word-of-mouth is the most powerful method of communication. We have face-to-face interaction, and people become familiar with us so the likelihood of participation is good. We also connect with local businesses and ask them to post fliers. We also post regular meetings and updates on our website.
- We receive emails from people and we have a listserv of people, service agencies, and other resources, where an e-mail blast is sent informing people of various events, giving updates, and other activities. Also, conversation, one-on-one. People talk a lot, and it's a good thing.
- Each organization has their efforts. We do not have a shortage of clients. Our biggest outreach is done in collaboration with one of our housing partners. Sponsoring different events at different times helps us capture more residents in our community. Once we get the residents to participate, we steer them into services. We let them know what is available and how we can help. For example we offer basketball at all hours; the midnight times are pretty popular. We get an average of 55 guys in the gym. We also have an initiative working with young women related to domestic violence and dating violence. The other program we have is a writing and poetry type of program. When we have events like these we get different people to come all based on word-of-mouth, then they know the other services we offer. It's a way to get them in the door.
- The Parent Patrol distributes fliers and sees the people face-to-face. Also through meetings held by other agencies and when the community members distribute services, they let the community know of various activities. The schools allow us to distribute fliers to the students, and the counselors let people know of events, resources and activities as well.
- As far as meetings go, the coalition sends e-mails and e-blasts regarding events and reminders. We do a lot of outreach. It depends on the event, but we can have word-of-mouth, fliers, and hear of events and opportunities from other meetings.
- We send e-mails, post fliers at places we know the community goes to, we invite people via the coalition, and also word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth is very powerful.
- Information is distributed via emails, phone calls, fliers, faxes, mailings and word-of-mouth.

**13. Do you have a way to gather suggestions from coalition or community members?
If yes, how?**

The coalitions appear to offer community members and partner organizations a variety of opportunities to gather suggestions. The verbatim responses are:

- At the coalition level every member has an equal vote and those in the committee bring up issues in the larger group and discuss those issues. We also have a strategic framework and we take the suggestions from the larger task force.
- Neighborhood networks. We get a lot of perspectives also during meetings.
- We usually gather information during our meetings and have a debriefing after an event to discuss what went wrong, what went right, and how we can make it better. We often hear from our community through meetings.
- Usually at the meeting and through the agencies where they receive services. Meetings are always a good way to gather information
- Usually at a meeting and through e-mails. When we need information we also conduct surveys. Most of the surveys of geared toward at-risk youth. We distribute surveys on the street and stop people and ask them to fill out a form, or talk to us a bit. Most of the surveys are done throughout our neighborhood.
- At any given time, people make suggestions. It can be during the town hall meetings and Safe Passage, or by walking in during our events.
- Through the Parent Patrol and feedback through the youth organizer. Also through our counselors, they often act as our eyes and ears in the schools to see what teens what, need, or issues they have.
- We always try to have meetings so people can make suggestions.
- E-mail and word-of-mouth, it goes both ways. People attend meetings and we make it known that people can make improvements or even provide suggestions
- They can suggest things via e-mail, or during meetings, basically anytime they want. We don't give them a specific time they can make suggestions. I think people are very comfortable giving their opinion in our neighborhood.
- Suggestions are voiced in meetings. Meetings are held on a monthly basis.

14. How do you know if your coalition is making a difference in your community?

Coalitions measure their impact in a number of ways, from increased collaboration and participation from youth and volunteers, to reviewing service participation data. It

appears there is no standardized process across the coalitions for assessing progress toward individual site goals, or a consistent feedback loop back to program funders that demonstrates progress toward the Safety New Works program goals or required activities discussed in pages 2-5. This is apparent through these verbatim responses:

- We have current data that is used to create programs and streamline services. This also provides a way to share information. We have volunteers that come out to our programs and activities. The increase in the volunteer pool I think speaks to the difference we are making in the community.
- We see that the school district in the area has invited the coalition to speak about expulsions and the issues in the classrooms. If the schools are coming to us, we know we are making a difference and they see it, too.
- By looking at our measurable outcomes. What we are using is the monthly progress reports and seeing how many people we serve and use the resources we have in the community. We have partnered with several agencies and we see that more people are requesting the services and more activity in the neighborhood.
- During the meetings each partner submits a monthly report and we make a site visit to several partners to see the progress. We also have a database where we can see how we are doing based on the numbers of drop-outs, violence, and graduation
- It's a hard question. First we haven't had enough time to see the outcome. We are new and it's hard to gauge the work we have done. Basically we are in the infancy stage, we are learning how to stand on our own, and to gauge our work is like asking us to run before we can walk. But I guess if you look at the incoming freshman and by the time they graduate from high school, you can see a difference. Because we are working with young people that are low-income and may be pushed out of school, we look to engage our youth and if we are doing a good job we would see more graduates and less drop-out.
- I think we can see it with being in our second year and being able to see the referral process. A lot more people want to give their input on the activities and events they want to see.
- Our neighborhood is very diverse. [Name of neighborhood] is basically split in two. The west is made up of primarily African Americans and the east is made up of Puerto Ricans. The two sides have collaborated. In the past they were two very different sides, with different goals. Since the collaboration we have created a forum for people to interact with each other. They are no longer strangers.
- We work with schools and do intense case management. We look at how they are doing and the progress students make. For example, we know that we are making

- Often training and sharing resources. We know we are making progress because we network and share resources. We also gain knowledge from what the community tells us.
- Honestly, we are still trying to figure that out. We have our goals and objectives and work plans. It's too early to tell if we have made a difference, we are only two years old.
- We evaluate ourselves based on attainment of objectives. We hear it from our community if they think we are making a difference. We see attitudes change.
- We have the evidence from the numbers of youth deciding to attend coalition programs versus violence.

15. In what ways has the coalition grown or evolved over the past year?

It appears as if the greatest strides toward coalition growth and evolution are twofold: First, the community is more familiar with the coalition and its activities and the coalition is more integrated within the community. Second, the coalition is holding itself accountable to the community and its goals and standardizing its business processes. The verbatim responses are:

- In terms of being able to see growth or change we can see where we were five years ago we know we have a high level of trust in the community. Everyone is pulling their own weight and people perform. We work together to apply for grants and seek money to withstand the goals we have as a community and agency. We share resources, too. We look to each other for help from making copies for fliers, to borrowing chairs for events.
- I think we have gotten better with our reporting, and knowing what we can do together. Especially with our budgeting. We have dropped some agencies that were not holding up their end of the bargain. We also send a message that we want everyone to work together.
- We have really grown. The community has grown and the community knows us so they are very active in our events.
- We are looking at systemizing the youth training. We expanded the programs we offer to them and how we give them the space to know about decision making. We have also involved faith-based organizations and their youth groups. Our plan is to create a year-round training for youth and we are in a good position to do that now. So I guess we have evolved in that way.

- I think we are still evolving and holding ourselves accountable. I think that we have grown just like I said before we started different programs, but they are still evolving.
- The population has shifted and activities have been modified to fit the population and cultural differences, but in a way that incorporates them together. I think the important part is communication.
- We also have the leadership meetings and how we try to offer more opportunities, events, services, and resources. We have established standardized dates for the meetings, and people pretty much know when we have the meetings for them to participate.
- In the events we plan and the information we give, we know we are making a difference. We know that youth get involved in different capacities. I think this is good way to see if we are growing
- It's a struggle, but as a coalition we came together very quickly because of the money and deadlines. We are including more businesses and faith-based organizations. We also get requests from other community leaders for us to participate in various community activities or to present at a high school. So maybe we are better known or people know that they can ask us to do things as well.
- I think it's intentional. Our goals have meaning; our youth is more active in activities, in leadership, and also in attending meetings. We have matured as an agency during the last two years, so have our youth that participate in the meetings. We find ways to mobilize our citizens. We attain a local audience and even make politicians aware of our programming. We make them aware of the issues surrounding our neighborhood and the existence of SNW.
- It's grown by increasing the number of partners.

16. To what extent does your coalition work to grow or enhance existing services to youth?

The coalitions are at various stages of service provision. This is evident from the types of responses to this question, and the range of responses received. The verbatim responses are:

- Those are the things we've done. We look to the wrap-around services, what we can provide. Also all the groups come together with teens and issues, like pregnancy and parenting issues. Our youth forums offer a lot of suggestions for programs.

- We made our group smaller and worked on new ways to incorporate our youth in our programs. We also asked for service learning classes for school credit. Some of the classes are peer educator classes. A lot of our programs have a lot to do with education, trying to show them an “out” through education.
- We basically have gravitation toward kids. Kids trust us and expect us to live up to the events, issues, and projects we developed through our goals and objectives.
- We know that we need to build confidence in our youth to reject violence, guns, and combat.
- Being a network to each other and educating the educator. A lot of the programs and even presentations made to youth groups have really grown and evolved. For example, we began to participate in a youth group for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgener (LGBT) and we present on relationships, identity, sexuality, and sex education.
- We meet on a monthly basis. The biggest challenge is to increase referrals of youth to each other. I'm constantly encouraging the need to maintain communication and work with each other. If we have weaknesses, then we find an agency that can help us in that weakness, or the opposite, if we have strengths, something we do well, then we help other agencies, all the time keeping in mind the community and the youth.
- Through the SNW, we have been able to leverage the relationships. We work together as a team and use the collaboration to apply for other grants. We have also worked with local political groups to enhance the services to youth.
- We have a summer job program and are able to work with youth on how to get a job and learn how to do basic jobs. The youth have an ability to gain self-confidence.
- I know we spend a lot of time thinking about it, but with the deficit we can only do so much. We have organized marches and such to Springfield and downtown. Money is not the only issue, but a need to maintain the resources we have.
- Through the strategic planning activities and the program planning working together to submit proposals and having one voice.
- The coalition has identified niche areas of each existing partner and has solicited partners whose niche is different or in areas lacking from existing partners.

17. To what extent does your coalition finish or implement new ideas or projects?

Overall, this question was viewed in terms of engaging in an event or activity. Responses to this question were mixed, with some sites having a strong capacity to complete

multiple tasks and others having a more difficult time engaging partners to assist them in initiatives and activities, which would facilitate a successful implementation. The verbatim responses are:

- We started and finished a lot of projects. If we didn't finish them, it's because the issue is not solved. When we start a new initiative, we start with a blueprint and expand on that. We have child care (a day care facility) in our neighborhood. We also started a Parent Patrol, the Health Ambassadors that discuss issues like drugs and alcohol. Through United Way, we have engaged the coalition in several initiatives. We have a fellowship program for youth to work with parents to develop communication skills. We have Choose Respect, another program started with the youth mini-grants.
- We try to be responsive to get young people involved. One of the new things that came about is media; specifically, music. We look to the things our youth are involved in. We developed this through seeing what youth connect to. For example, we met with NPR and other radio shows and showed some of our youth about this work and how they can learn about the things they like. We have partnered with a university in this project.
- The strategic plan and different programs we started have helped us follow through on projects. It depends on how and what issues need to be addressed in the neighborhood. Sometimes due to a neighborhood emergency we may have to start a new program right away
- I guess we try to have some rules and regulations. We know that when we collaborate as a subcommittee we report to the coalition and make collaborative decisions on events and plans for our community.
- I think that's the struggle we have right now, and it seems that we have the same groups or same people participate. We would like to include more members, different members, and different participants instead of the same groups that join in collaboration with us. But I can't say that a project is ever finished.
- On a scale from 1 – 10, I would give us a 6. Because there is a lot to do still in our community. Although we have a plan a lot of times we are asked to do a lot or asking the community to do a lot as well. It's a process of learning how to work together. To be mutually supportive of people and our goals. We have begun to expand on the capacity building.
- When we have a town hall meeting, we evaluate an activity or an event. We have a debriefing on what we did right, what we did wrong and how we can improve for next time. I don't think we will ever be finished, until violence is completely gone, and we both know that it is going to take a long time.

- An evaluation is a good way to see if there are other things we can do. When I say evaluations, I don't mean writing a survey, but just asking each other. Did we do this right, or that? I do have to say that we argue, and I don't think that's a bad thing. If we argue, we are very passionate about expressing our opinions about a program, an activity, or a particular organization. I can appreciate that people are challenging the activities because that shows me that people care.
- We are doing a good job. An example of a new idea is bringing the middle school kids to the table, and teaching them leadership skills. The follow-through of ideas we have and participation with schools has been expanded thanks to our counselors. We have developed field trips and partnered with universities as well.
- We submit proposals for new ideas and projects. We know when projects finish because we have an end date, or a time for an activity to end. Since we are new, most of what we started is not finished. It's hard to say if we ever will finish because we have a lot of work to do in our community.
- The coalition works very diligently to finish or implement new ideas. Most new ideas have been completed or are past the development stage.

Summary and Conclusion

This report presented the various strategies employed by community coalitions to engage their communities in comprehensive, coordinated youth violence prevention activities through a coalition approach that involves state-funded human services providers and non-traditional community-based organizations and/or informal groups. These coalitions address a wide range of individual, family, and community factors that keep young people from reaching their full potential by providing services, interventions, and other supports that help build healthy environments. These efforts encourage youth to thrive while promoting youth engagement and leadership.

Overall, the coalitions have worked hard to build recognition and trust within their community and existing local organizations. Future activities might include site-to-site technical assistance, whereby the more entrenched coalitions work with struggling coalitions to offer suggestions and support. Additionally, it might be helpful for all sites to engage in a standardized process to assess their own progress toward the Safety Net Works goals and required activities. This would allow program funders to conduct cross-site analysis to determine future technical assistance needs.

The examples in this report serve as a guide for new community coalitions in developing their work plan and achieving their mission; and they demonstrate the strength in numbers when communities band together to improve conditions and outcomes for its youth and young adults.