COORDINATING THE BLUEPRINT FOR SAFETY: STRATEGIES TO STAY FOCUSED AND MOVE FORWARD

A Blueprint coordinator leads a process, whether working one-on-one with a key ally or whether utilizing a work group or convening an interagency or community-wide meeting. Meetings of all shapes, sizes, and configurations are a main tool for getting things done in a Blueprint community. To build and sustain a Blueprint for Safety requires skilled organizing and facilitation in many settings, from persuading agency administrators to supporting the adaptation team; from managing practice assessment and policy writing activities to dealing with resistance, personalities, and unexpected events.

Blueprint coordinators come to the position with many relevant skills, but with different levels of experience in applying those skills. Some will be seasoned social change advocates with lengthy experience in negotiation, coalition-building, analysis, and managing change. Others will be relatively new to the work and familiar with such skills more in theory than in practice. The following strategies help expand and reinforce necessary coordination skills.

STRATEGY: SEEK ADVICE

Seeking advice is a hallmark of skilled organizing and facilitation. Sources available to a Blueprint coordinator include:

- **Blueprint Advocate**

The Blueprint advocate is a problem-solving partner: someone with whom the coordinator can explore issues and scenarios in relation to the possible impact on victims of battering.

- **Blueprint organizers and supporters**

Along with members of the adaptation team, those most invested in the Blueprint are also likely to be knowledgeable about key partners and processes.

- **Knowledgeable community members and leaders**

A person can have little direct connection with the Blueprint adaptation process, but be a valuable source of information and advice about the community or systemic advocacy and change. For example, a coordinator might seek advice from the director of the YWCA or local rape crisis center, retired system practitioners, a former tribal chair, or community organizers affiliated with social justice issues.

- **OVW-designated technical assistance (TA) providers**

A TA provider can consult on community-specific problems related to organizing the Blueprint and connect a coordinator with in-person training, webinars, and publications. For example, the following

kinds of assistance via Praxis International can help expand the knowledge and skills related to organizing and facilitating the interagency, systemic change that is at the center of the Blueprint: Essential Skills in Coordinating Your Community Response to Battering: An E-Learning Course for CCR Coordinators, in-person training institutes, webinars related to advocacy and to criminal legal system change, and guides to analyzing institutional practice.[1]

- **Non-profit and social change resource centers, university extension programs, and community colleges**

Classes, conferences, and publications provided by these kinds of organizations can be helpful sources of advice on such topics as responding to group dynamics, facilitating effective discussions, crafting messages, and expanding cultural awareness and respect.

- **Tribal and state coalitions working to end violence against women**

Coalitions can provide expertise and advice on issues related to data collection, legislation, and policy issues.

GOOD ADVICE: THE COMMUNITY TOOL BOX

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A public service of the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, the Community Tool Box provides free on-line tool kits related organizing and coordinating community change, such as that involved in establishing a Blueprint for Safety. The Tool Box provides step-by-step guidance in community-building skills, from creating and maintaining partnerships and assessing community needs and resources to building leadership, enhancing cultural competence, and evaluating an initiative. For example, Chapter 16 in the Leadership and Management tool kit provides how-to advice on group facilitation and problem-solving: (1) conducting effective meetings, (2) developing facilitation skills, (3) capturing what people say, and (4) techniques for leading group discussions.

http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/leadership/group-facilitation

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[1] For details on available resources and technical assistance, go to www.praxisinternational.org.

STRATEGY: USE THE RULES

From its decades of work with communities seeking to change the response to violence against women, Praxis has defined four "rules" for institutional or systems change advocacy. Attention to the rules helps a coordinator keep each phase of the Blueprint focused and moving a forward.

#1: Centralize victim safety and engagement.

- Knowing the scope and scale of violence against women in our communities is one way that we help to centralize the Blueprint's principles of victim safety and engagement.

- Workers analyzing problems will drift toward increasing efficiency and away from what works for victims. It is easy to focus on making the system run more effectively from the agency's perspective. This happens not out of bad intentions but because of how institutions typically organize how cases are processed.

- Advocates centralize women and children's experiences within in their organizations. They have a key role in leading interagency work to focus on the needs, safety, and well-being of women/survivors.

#2: Develop a strong knowledge base.

- In other words, homework is critical. Effective coordination rests on knowledge of the Blueprint as an approach and process, the structure and function of community systems, local political and interpersonal dynamics, and the scope and scale of domestic violence.

- We cannot assume that anecdotes, advice from individuals, personal experience, statistics, etc., show the whole picture. There are many dimensions to developing a strong knowledge base, including statistical data, studying how institutions process cases, and learning about victims' lived experiences with the criminal legal system.

- Research the issues and know:

    o Statistical and demographic data for battering and domestic violence-related crimes

    o Circumstances victims of battering face

    o Institutional responses and their outcomes

    o How workers are organized to act on cases

    o Institutional assumptions, theories, and concepts

#3 Use a systemic and social change analysis.

- In assessing and analyzing current practice, seek to expose systemic problems, not individual behavior.

- Focus on case processing and weaknesses in case processing that contribute to poor outcomes for victims/survivors.

- Know and recognize how community systems standardize their responses to battering.

#4 Use a model of constructive engagement.

- Be respectful. An atmosphere of criticism or personal attack is counter-productive to the Blueprint's emphasis on mutual, interagency problem-solving.

- Assume that practitioners and others participating in Blueprint adaptation and implementation can and will help.

- Build relationships and trust. Work with people as true colleagues.

- Understand the consequences for victims and survivors of using a judgmental approach with practitioners: i.e., judgement and blame discourage practitioner openness and engagement with victims/survivors.

- Remain solution-oriented and avoid backing a practitioner or agency into a corner.

- As a leader, facilitate analysis and problem solving.

STRATEGY: BE ALERT TO COMMON PITFALLS

A Blueprint coordinator who is prepared—i.e., who seeks advice and follows the use-the-rule strategies outlined above—will keep the work moving forward. A skilled coordinator will also stay alert and try to avoid common pitfalls related to organizing and facilitating a multifaceted effort such as the Blueprint. These pitfalls include:

- The temptation to "go it alone" rather than face the often messy and frustrating realities of group process and investment or utilize the adaptation team

- Overreliance on a one-to-one approach at the expense of building an effective, involved adaptation team

- Reluctance to question how and why things happen as they do in the criminal legal system: i.e., limited curiosity about how the system works or does not work for people

- Doing only those tasks that the easiest or most comfortable to do

- Accepting historic conflicts as current process: i.e., assuming that because agencies or individuals have had a bad experience in past that they cannot work together now

- Relying solely on an official body—e.g., prosecutor or sheriff's office or probation agency—to conclude that a policy or practice is "good," without gauging the actual implications and impact on people's lives

- Failing to keep practitioners and agency staff at all levels informed about and involved in Blueprint adaptation and implementation, from those in a central policy-making and supervisory role to first responders

- Overreliance on e-mail communication at the expense of personal contact, particularly when announcing important work or inviting people to a critical discussion

- Lack of sufficient distribution, review, and comment time for policy documents, leaving people feeling left out of the process

- Haphazard welcome and introductions to those attending Blueprint meetings and events, leaving people feeling ignored and slighted

- Leaving under-served or over-scrutinized communities out of the process or invited to participate as an afterthought.

- Limited or sloppy data-gathering and presentation

- Allowing one agency or individual to use the Blueprint approach and process to "get" another

- Drifting away from ongoing victim-survivor input and guidance

- Lack of advance preparation (i.e., facilitation, attendance, roles, process) and clear goals for meetings

The best way to avoid these kinds of common pitfalls brings a coordinator full circle: seek advice and follow the rules.