



# CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

January 2019

Benjamin Gleason, PhD & Sarah Gretter, PhD



## INTRODUCTION

Despite constraints in resources, the demands on community-based prevention programs for performance accountability and outcomes is increasing (Hunter et al., 2009). As such, capacity building and strategic planning are key elements in the implementation and sustainability of intervention programs (Johnson, Hays, Center & Daley, 2004). This review explores conceptual and pragmatic perspectives on capacity building and strategic planning in prevention programs.

At the implementation level, Terzian, Moore, Williams-Taylor & Nguyen (2009) suggest that rigorous research criteria for the selection of evidence-based out-of-school programs is key to the impact said intervention can have on the targeted community. They share a guide to help organizations identify and select said programs based on a set of specific recommendations. In turn, Hunter, Chinman, Ebener, Imm, Wandersman & Ryan (2009) propose to look at technical assistance (TA) as a popular method to improve community programming capacities in the prevention field. Their study provides evidence for the use of TA and presents a TA model to build community program capacity for substance abuse prevention.

At the sustainability level, Spoth, Greenberg, Bierman & Redmond (2004) present the PROSPER model, a framework aiming to guide capacity building in state public education systems for the effective delivery of evidence-based interventions. Their multi-level approach hones in on the concept of linkages, or the coordination of efforts between agents serving in different yet interrelated roles to enhance the sustainability of interventions. Similarly, Johnson, Hays, Center & Daley (2004) present a planning model for sustaining prevention innovations. Their framework describes the goals, subsequent objectives, and essential steps needed to support sustainable innovations in prevention systems.

### ARTICLE 1 ONLINE RESOURCES FOR IDENTIFYING EVIDENCE-BASED, OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS: A USER'S GUIDE

#### SUMMARY

**The authors of this guide provide funders, administrators, and practitioners with a set of online resources to identify evidence-based programs, including out-of-school time programs for their respective communities.** Although there are disagreements about the scholarly definition of evidence-based programs, researchers tend to agree that for a program to be deemed effective and rigorous, the program in question must be experimentally evaluated,

replicated, and show evidence of sustained impact. The authors categorize evidence-based programs from less to more rigorous as: i) evidence-informed, non-experimental, ii) quasi-experimental, iii) experimental, and iv) replicated experimental. Characteristics for the analysis of existing data to form the guide included evidence level, breadth and depth, flexibility of search methods, search terms, sponsors, and status (live or archived). As a result, the authors compiled 21 resources in their guide, where 11 are searchable databases, 2 are online interactive summaries and 8 are online documents. The guide produced by the authors also provides readers with recommendations, questions, and follow-up steps when searching for evidence-based programs, summarized below:

### **Recommendations**

- Engage in program planning with key community stakeholders
- Identify short and long-term outcomes
- Identify databases that address your targeted outcomes
- Recognize that evidence-based programs for many outcomes of interest may not currently exist
- Search multiple databases
- Keep searching, as new programs get added to databases

### **Questions**

- Has the program been evaluated with your target population?
- Does the program address risk factors that are relevant to your target population or community?
- What level of evaluation or evidence or rigor is available for the type of intervention you seek?
- Do desired outcome match the achieved outcomes?
- How long does it take to implement the program?
- Does the program have a manual or a curriculum?
- Is the program active or is it no longer implemented?
- What resources are necessary to implement and sustain the program?

### **Follow-up steps**

- Assess requirements for implementing the program with fidelity
- Determine whether implementation is feasible and sustainable
- Develop an organized system for collecting data on program quality, implementation, and outcomes.

**The authors concluded by stating that there is a great need for high-quality evidence-based programs, and that knowing how to identify them is key to the impact an organization can have on its community.**

---

#### CITATION

Terzian, M., Moore, K. A., Williams-Taylor, L., & Nguyen, H. (2009). Online resources for identifying evidence-based, out-of-school time programs: A user's guide. *Child Trends: Research-to-Results Brief*. Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Philanthropies.

#### **ARTICLE 2 PROSPER COMMUNITY–UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEMS: CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR EVIDENCE-BASED, COMPETENCE-BUILDING PREVENTION**

---

#### SUMMARY

This article describes the PROSPER model, a partnership framework to link capacity agents in state public education systems for the effective delivery of evidence-based interventions. **The authors argue that there is an inadequate infrastructure and dissemination of evidence-based programs and highlight the need for sustainable family and youth intervention delivery.** Their framework provides that capacity through a community-university partnership that can support state and local education systems in their endeavors to enhance student learning and development. The rationale for such partnership between schools, universities, and communities lies in the fact that each entity can rely on their previously established infrastructures (training, technical assistance, etc) for the implementation of evidence-based programs.

**Central to the authors' framework is the idea of "linking concept" --the coordination of efforts between agents serving in different yet interrelated roles in the public education system.** In this model, external agents (i.e., state university, department of education) provide resources to generate intervention training (i.e., technical assistance, evaluation), while internal agents (i.e., students, families) provide capacity and sustains resources for recipients of the interventions. The linking agents between the external and internal agents is the state university Extension system. The authors elaborate on an application of their framework through the PROSPER partnership model: PROMoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience.

**They conceptualize the mission of the PROSPER partnership to foster the implementation of evidence-based youth and family competence-building interventions through local needs assessment, intervention monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of intervention outcomes.** In the PROSPER model, partners are represented by i) the land-grant university Extension System, ii) elementary and secondary school system personnel, and iii) community providers and community stakeholders, which operate at three different levels: i) school and local community strategic teams (i.e., local internal, external, and linking agents), ii) intermediate coordinating teams (i.e., linking agents, regional technical assistants), and iii) state level teams (i.e., external resource agents). The authors agree that while the PROSPER model still awaits validation through trial evidence, they underline that the model demonstrates how, through its multi-level approach, addresses the problem of capacity enhancement in terms of sustainability in the implementation of evidence-based interventions.

---

#### CITATION

Spoth, R., Greenberg, M., Bierman, K., & Redmond, C. (2004). PROSPER community–university partnership model for public education systems: Capacity-building for evidence-based, competence-building prevention. *Prevention Science*, 5(1), 31-39.

### ARTICLE 3 BUILDING CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABLE PREVENTION INNOVATIONS: A SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING MODEL

---

#### SUMMARY

The implementation and validation of innovative prevention programs (school-based, family-based, environmental) has been an important focus in fields like substance abuse, health promotion, or violence prevention. However, the authors of this article argue that prevention innovations have been centered primarily around implementation without a focus on sustaining them after funding has ended. **As a result, the authors present a planning model for sustaining prevention innovations.** Through a thorough review of the literature, they define sustainability as “the process of ensuring an adaptive prevention system and a sustainable innovation that can be integrated into ongoing operations to benefit diverse stakeholders” (p. 137).

According to these terms, sustainability is considered when i) maintaining benefits achieved through an initial program, ii) continuing the program within an organization, and iii) building

the capacity of the recipient community to continue the program. The authors further define sustainability readiness--the degree of success of the sustainability actions taken by an organization through the achievement of the following outcomes: the integration of an innovation into normal operations, and key stakeholders' benefits received as a result of the innovation.

To illustrate the path to such success, the authors developed a sustainability model looking at two main goals, followed by subsequent objectives, and steps needed to sustain an innovation.

### **Goals and objectives**

#### **1. Build, support, and strengthen infrastructure capacity**

- a. Strengthen and maintain formal structures and linkage
- b. Strengthen and maintain champion roles and leadership
- c. Increase and maintain resources (i.e., funding, staffing, technology)
- d. Strengthen and maintain policies and procedures
- e. Build and maintain expertise

#### **2. Effectively address the needs of innovation stakeholders**

- a. Increase and maintain alignment of innovation stakeholder needs with the innovation's characteristics
- b. Establish and maintain positive relationships among the innovation's developers and organizational decision-makers
- c. Conduct process evaluation to ensure ongoing implementation quality and integrity
- d. Increase knowledge of the innovation's effectiveness
- e. Strengthen ownership of the innovation among adopters

### **5-step cyclical process**

1. Assess prevention infrastructure and innovation readiness
2. Develop sustainability plan
3. Execute sustainability actions
4. Evaluate sustainability readiness
5. Reassess and modify sustainability plan

**The authors' prototype planning model for sustaining innovations therefore presents a way to address concerns identified in the literature, namely the capacity of prevention systems to**

**support sustainable innovations, and the extent to which a specific innovation is sustainable.** Their sustainability action strategy will be followed by a tool kit and testing under experimental conditions to further evaluate its efficacy.

---

#### CITATION

Johnson, K., Hays, C., Center, H., & Daley, C. (2004). Building capacity and sustainable prevention innovations: a sustainability planning model. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 27(2), 135-149.

### ARTICLE 4 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AS PREVENTION CAPACITY-BUILDING TOOL: A DEMONSTRATION USING THE GETTING TO OUTCOMES® FRAMEWORK

---

#### SUMMARY

Technical assistance (TA) is a popular method to improve community programming capacities in the prevention field. It comprises elements such as community-friendly manuals, on-site consultations, regional workshops, train-the-trainer models, and web-based systems. **Effective TA models can improve the ability for community-based organizations to plan, implement and evaluate their outcomes.** However, the research looking at the impact of TA is methodologically lagging. The present article aims to develop an evidence base for the use of TA and presents a TA model that has showed effectiveness in building community program capacity for substance abuse prevention.

The study presents the Getting to Outcomes (GTO) framework, a ten-step process aiming to grow prevention capacity through evidence-based practices to plan, implement, and evaluate programs. **In this specific GTO program, community practitioners work with a TA who serves as a coach or facilitator.** The authors use a set of mixed methods to describe the effectiveness of their TA model delivered by three TA providers to fifteen staff members distributed among six programs in two substance abuse prevention organizations over a two-year period. The research looked specifically at i) TA delivery, ii) GTO steps, iii) TA components, iv) TA perception, and v) TA action distribution (between TA provider and recipient). Through TA notes, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires, the authors found that the majority of TA providers' time was spent through communication with recipient. TA providers served mainly as a guide to practitioners by setting goals and providing structure.

One specific area of help that programs received was with evaluation activities. Some organizational barriers were also identified in the data, such as high staff turnover and funding constraints. **The authors conclude that effective TA is bidirectional, from disseminating information to listening and learning from practitioners.** While the authors identify some limitations to their study, including the lack of observation of a long-term effect of TA, TA cost, and a small sample size, they open the conclusion of their paper to a call for future research to evaluate TA delivery on a larger scale, and with rigorous design and instrument to show its effectiveness for building prevention capacity in community-based organizations.

---

#### CITATION

Hunter, S. B., Chinman, M., Ebener, P., Imm, P., Wandersman, A., & Ryan, G. W. (2009). Technical assistance as a prevention capacity-building tool: a demonstration using the getting to outcomes® framework. *Health Education & Behavior, 36*(5), 810-828.

#### CONCLUSION

This review explored recent research (from the past decade) that investigated how community coalitions, partnerships, and providers can collaborate to build capacity and identify and select effective, evidence-based prevention programming aligned to their community needs. This review also surfaced the finding that existing research has focused on capacity building, whereas the literature on the process behind identifying and selecting effective programming has been somewhat overshadowed. A search of the literature suggested that there were many more studies on capacity building (step two of the Strategic Prevention Framework planning model) and fewer studies on implementation (step three of the SPF). In addition to providing useful information for coalitions, states, and providers about the importance of capacity building and implementation efforts, this review reminds us about the importance of integrating sustainability efforts into the overall prevention initiative, as these will prove crucial.

Specifically, this review included relevant research from a number of public health scholars. In the first article, Terzian et al (2009) conducted a literature review of a large number of public health databases and found a number of significant findings about how to most effectively select an effective prevention program. The authors emphasized that a committed search is a critical step in identifying the program to meet the community's needs, noting that it may be necessary to "keep searching," if one cannot be found. In addition, the authors reminded us



that implementation and evaluation are key factors, once prevention programming has been identified.

In the second article, Spoth and colleagues (2004) described a framework for public health that leverages the public education system in order to develop “linking” capacity that connects stakeholders, prevention systems, and students and families to better serve communities. The authors proposed that a multi-level system was necessary for effective capacity-building that integrates evaluation and sustainability efforts.

The authors of the third article, Johnson et al (2004), focused on the implementation stage of the prevention framework, reiterating the need to incorporate sustainability in the planning process. Their focus on sustainability refers back to the degree to which there is capacity to continue to reach the goals of the prevention initiative after initial outcomes are reached.

In the fourth article, Hunter and colleagues (2009) researched the ways in which effective technical assistance (TA) can support prevention efforts, finding that technical assistance provided through a coach or facilitator can spur a number of valuable outcomes. By focusing on intensive communication with the prevention provider, the coach or facilitator provides necessary guidance and leverages experience and expertise to reach their goals. Setting goals and providing structure to providers was a particularly valuable outcome for prevention providers.

Overall, this review found that a key part of effective capacity building and program selection and implementation is effective support and technical assistance. All four articles suggested that this intensive support (by providing recommendations, asking important questions, focusing on key follow-up questions) that comes from high-quality technical assistance can help providers, coalitions, and states reach their prevention goals.

---

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

Benjamin Gleason, PhD is the Director of Applied Research for the Prospectus Group. He earned a PhD in Educational Psychology & Educational Technology from Michigan State University, researching how to best support communities of learners through educational technology. Before academia, Benjamin has worked in youth and adult-serving learning spaces for almost fifteen years, from designing youth-initiated community service projects and teaching high school in Richmond, California, to working as a university instructor in Guatemala. Benjamin is also a founder of the Prospectus Group.

Sarah Gretter, PhD is a Research Associate for the Prospectus Group and a pedagogy specialist at the Hub for Innovation in Learning and Technology at Michigan State University. She earned her PhD in Educational Psychology & Educational Technology from Michigan State university, and her research uses frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior to promote a culture of change in higher education. Sarah's work is grounded in educational research, and her projects range from individual consulting to large course re-design.