Healthy Community Grants Program
Early Lessons Learned From Community Engagement and Planning

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Introduction

The Maine Health Access Foundation (MeHAF) committed to improving the health of everyone in Maine, especially people who are uninsured and medically undererved. Our priority is to improve health and well-being. MeHAF’s objectives are to identify, support, and assist communities in creating a comprehensive plan and strategy for health improvement.

MeHAF believes that a single organization or sector can be responsible for the health of a community, and that improving health requires us to think holistically in supporting coordinated action from individuals, organizations, government, and community development organizations, to raise a few.

Healthy hits on the intersection of many systems and sectors within our communities. MeHAF’s strategy is to improve health across communities through participatory, collaborative, community-led efforts that can help transform communities into supportive environments that enable people to live healthier lives. Trying to improve, align, and connect these systems is difficult, especially, if done in ways that impact and synchronize themselves to the least experienced or marginalized people. MeHAF is taking a strong team approach to improving health in communities, which encompasses these distinctions.

Pre-planning, inquiry, and engagement process that facilitates discussions among diverse stakeholders in a community to identify no more than two priority health issues for their community, and to provide the picture of progress in communities.

Planning process where communities are expected to develop a plan with a common agenda that aligns with programs and services of multiple partners to meet the most significant and address the selected health issues, and implementation plan that supports communities in implementing a community-informed action plan that reflects partnerships, community engagement, system change, and learning and evaluation.

What follows is a synthesis of greater data gathered through the completion of the planning phase. Eleven grants were awarded for the 3-year project implementation phase.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluation draws from multiple data sources, which were coded and triangulated to extract themes across grantees within the Planning cohort.

• Grantee interviews
• Project Director surveys
• Document review Grantee meeting observation
• Site visits: case studies
• Data interpretation meeting using data placement

Evaluation Questions

1. What were the perceived contributions of the planning process to health outcomes observed?
2. How were people who are most affected by the health issues involved in the process?
3. What strategies were used to help enhance public participation?
4. What other activities did grantees engage in as community members?
5. What evidence gaps are you seeing today?
6. What evidence do you see that the changes are attributable to collective action?

Indicators and Descriptions

The projects were designed to be inclusive of individuals who are most affected by health issues, and there were strategies used to help enhance public participation. The projects had successful strategies for involving people who are most affected by health issues, and the strategies were observed to have been effective, especially in areas where there were evidence gaps.

Evaluating/Measuring Health Outcomes

The projects used several strategies to evaluate and measure health outcomes. These strategies included the use of surveys, focus groups, and community meetings. The projects also used qualitative and quantitative data to track progress and measure outcomes.

Discussion

Early Lessons Learned from the Planning Phase

• Building the planning phase was small-scale pilot of ideas generated by the partners. The planning phase was successful in identifying and addressing priority stakeholders.
• Several grantees observed that they plan to pilot new ideas, evaluate them, learn from them, and adapt their strategies. They know that gathering information on what works and doesn’t work at the pilot stage will help them determine direction and provide the evidence they need to advocate for expansion.

References


