

3 Bold Steps for School Community Change: A Toolkit for Community Leaders



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A Toolkit for Community Leaders

If you're a concerned individual from law enforcement, education, mental health, juvenile justice, children's services, family members, faith-based organizations, or similar organizations, there's a way to create positive change in schools and communities that doesn't require large amounts of money.

We've collected the lessons learned from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) initiative in a toolkit that can be used in any community.



Toolkit Structure

This toolkit shares the key lessons, tools, and resources that were found to be most helpful for creating comprehensive systems change within the SS/HS initiative.

The toolkit is divided into three bold steps:



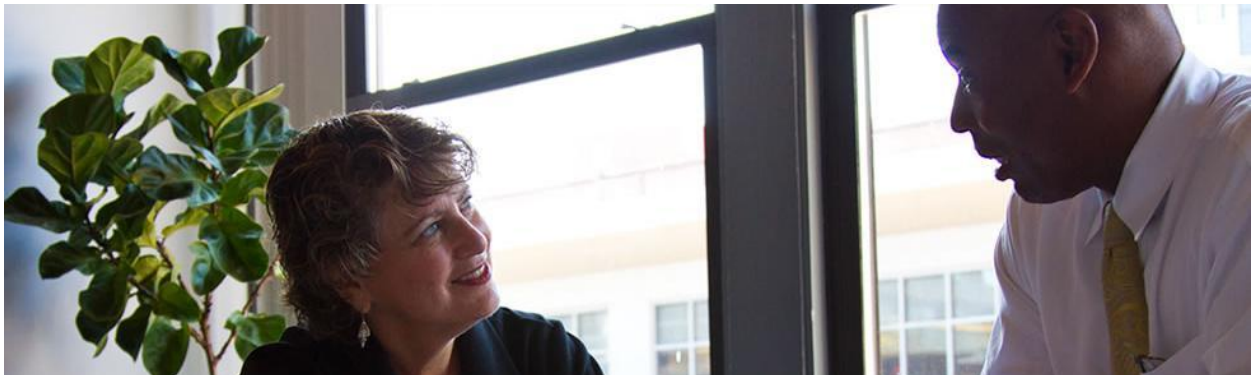
Each step will provide you with:

- a series of actions to help you achieve that step,
- video interviews with individuals, who have been through the process,
- and tools and resources to help you accomplish each step.

Bold Step 1: Build a Broad Partnership

Creating change takes time, commitment, and vision. It also takes people who are willing and able to work together. As you begin to plan for lasting community change, it's important to attract, enlist, and keep the right people at the table. Effective community collaborations involve others with shared interests and goals, work across sectors and disciplines, tap key decision makers, and get the work done.

The Actions in Bold Step 1 will guide you through the process of forging such a partnership.



Action 1: Identify the right partners

A few guiding questions will help you to identify who needs to be at the table:

- Which agencies and community groups work with children, youth and families?
- Who are the key decision makers?
- Do they already have programs or policies in place to address your key issue(s)?
- Who holds the purse strings?
- Have you worked with them before?

Depending on your key issue(s), you may want to representatives from law enforcement, mental health, schools, juvenile justice, social service, early childhood workers or primary care doctors. Remember, the key to an effective partnership will be to bring the right people to the table with you, those who can promote lasting change in your community.



Image: National Institutes of Health

Action 2: Bring partners to the table

After you've identified the right potential partners, ask yourself "What's in it for them?" Answering this question will help you understand their motivation and find ways to bring them on board. When you understand what motivates each potential partner, you can create an approach that will resonate with them—one that addresses their concerns and speaks their language. You may find that potential partners share your concerns about your schools and community, but look at them in a different way. Do your research so you can establish a common language and common goals among all partners.



Action 3: Create a shared vision

With a dedicated group of like-minded partners now working together toward a common goal, it's time to create a shared vision for addressing the challenges in your community. This step is built on trust. You can develop trust among partners by nurturing relationships, finding positive connections, and understanding one another's values and beliefs.

A shared vision can be a real catalyst for change and can “unleash new energy” in the group. The following questions may help you establish a shared vision with your partners:

- What kind of community do we want for our children?
- What barriers stand in our way?
- What role will each of us play in getting us to our desired outcome?



Action 4: Create agreement for working together

Effective partnerships move beyond sharing information and resources to establishing interdependent systems and creating lasting changes in the community. You have already laid the groundwork by bringing organizations to the table and creating a shared vision. The next step is developing a formal agreement about the structure of your partnership. Together, determine rules and procedures to ensure that partners know how to work together, what their goals are, and what is required of them. Formalize them in Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) or Agreement (MOA) and agree on a timetable for reviewing them.



Action 5: Share leadership and ownership

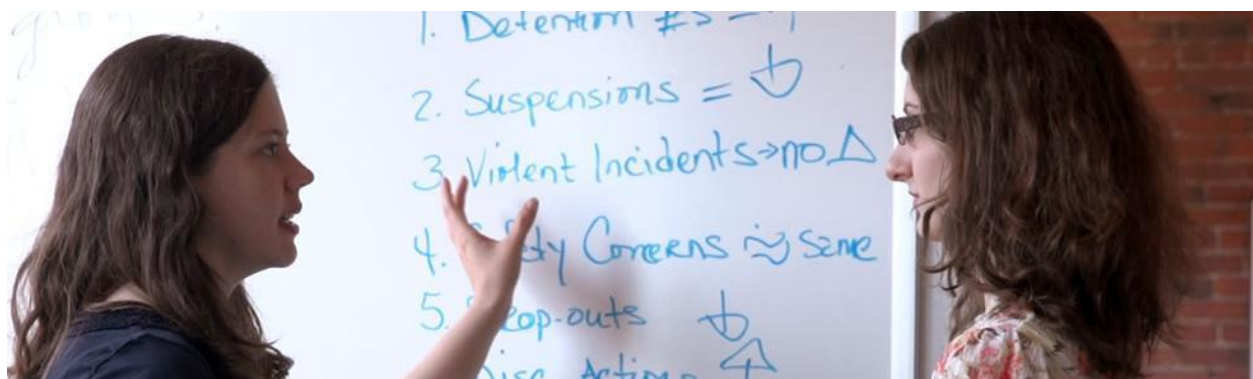
At the root of successful and long-standing partnerships is shared leadership and ownership. A cross agency leadership team, consisting of key members of your partnership, can be a key vehicle for establishing shared leadership. Each member of the leadership team can take ownership of the partnership's goals and outcomes. They accomplish this by specifying how they will play an integral role in the overall success of the initiative, project, or program.



Bold Step 2: Create a Goal-Driven Plan

Careful planning guided by your shared goals and vision provides a roadmap to achieving your desired outcomes. Your plans may include implementing programs, promoting favorable policies, or creating systems change. You'll want to provide clearly defined direction, identify the most effective use of resources (staffing, partnerships, materials, training, funding), and capitalize on cross agency support to implement, promote, monitor, modify, and evaluate your efforts.

The Action Steps in Bold Step 2 will help your partnership create a plan that will engage key community stakeholders and build commitment and ownership among them as you put the plan into action.

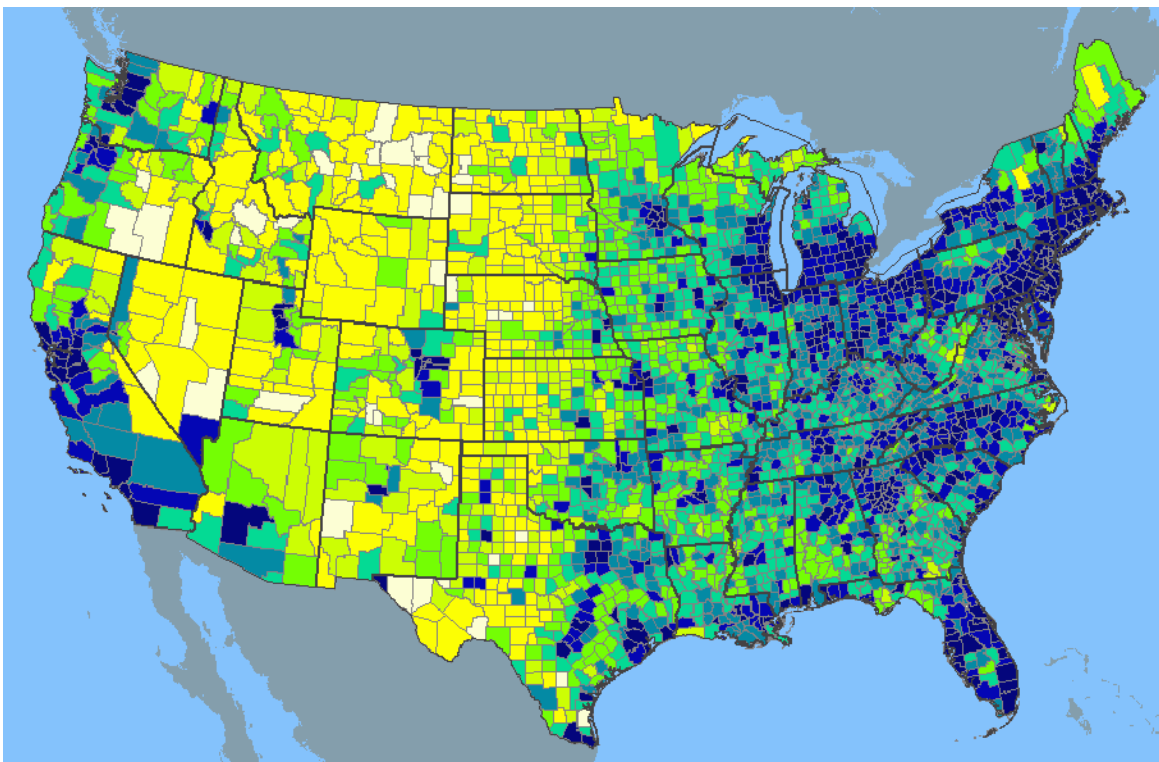


Action 1: Assess community needs and resources

To develop an effective plan, you must understand your community's needs, assets, existing resources, and gaps in services. Resource mapping and environmental scanning are two strategies you can use to help you assess these factors. These processes help you:

- Analyze your community's demographics to understand the different populations.
- Identify who is not being reached through existing programs and services
- Determine who is most at-risk for negative outcomes.
- Create an inventory of available resources and how community members can access them.
- Identify service gaps and plan how to fill them.

You can then use these data to guide the formulation of your goal-driven plan.



Action 2: Agree on outcomes and how to measure them

Your shared vision helped you define common goals that partners should address. With those goals in mind, identify the measurable shared outcomes you want to achieve as a

partnership. Use the data from your community assessment to define outcomes that help you reach your goals, and fit your community's needs and resources. Once you decide on specific outcomes, determine common measurements that all partners will use to gauge the effectiveness of your efforts. Your partnership will be positioned to create collective impact, and your common measurements will help you know when you've arrived.



Action 3: Draw your roadmap

Now it's time to get things on paper to create a targeted and comprehensive plan. You can use all the data you've gathered to this point to draw a step by step roadmap of your plan. Using a logic model is one effective way to create a roadmap; once created it structures your plan for moving forward. Logic models include:

- Community assets and resources
- Gaps in services
- Baseline data against which you can measure outcomes
- Goals and objectives
- Activities and programs that address your goals and fit the populations served
- Outcome measures and data collection plan



Action 4: Prepare for implementation

Your careful planning comes together as you prepare to implement your activities and programs. Now partners will need to make decisions together about the fit of programs practices and activities, their cultural appropriateness, feasibility of implementation, and availability of ongoing training, coaching and support. As you plan implementation, consider refining existing policies or creating new ones on issues such as referral processes, information sharing, or budgeting that can make your programs and services more sustainable. Look for steps to take as you are implementing that will create sustainable infrastructure keeping programs in place.



Action 5: Develop an evaluation strategy

Measuring the outcomes of your efforts is an integral part of implementing a comprehensive plan. When developing your evaluation strategy, give careful consideration to determining the most appropriate data collection strategies. Use process evaluation measures to analyze program implementation, and outcome evaluation measures to assess program effectiveness. Process measures will help you determine the need to make mid-course corrections or adjustments, while outcome measures help to determine if the desired results are being achieved. You may want to enlist an outside evaluator to guide this process.



Bold Step 3: Ensure Success

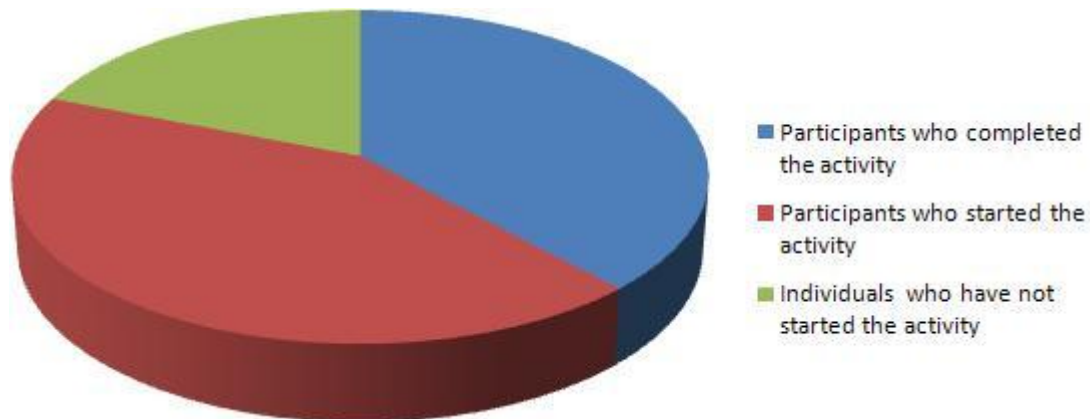
Bold Step 3 is where “the rubber hits the road” and your careful partnering and planning are put into action. The Actions in Bold Step 3 will help you and your partners effectively implement your plan and propel you toward sustainability and lasting change in your community.



Action 1: Follow your plan and monitor results

Ideally, partners will share responsibility for all aspects of implementing your plan. This includes maintaining program management and oversight, providing administrative support, and offering ongoing training for program staff.

Knowing how well strategies were implemented will help your partnership make decisions going forward. Monitor each strategy for effectiveness throughout program implementation by collecting evaluation data. You can collect process data about program implementation, such as the number of participants in a training program; or the number of families receiving services. You should also be collecting outcome data on the common outcome measures your partners collected.



Action 2: Make data-informed decisions

Collecting process data (e.g., how many people participate in a training) and outcome data (e.g., reduction in truancy) will help your partnership to make data-informed decisions about programs and services in your community. Analyze process measures to see where implementation needs to be strengthened. Use data on common outcomes to help you see which actions are providing the most benefit to community members. This fact-based insight will allow you to make the best collective decisions about what programs to keep in place or expand, and which to refine or eliminate.

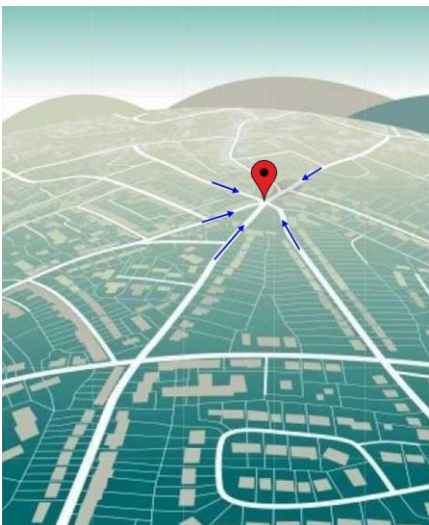


Action 3: Focus on sustainability

It's never too early for partnerships to focus on sustainability and lasting change. Your leaders can transform the way education and community partners work together through multiple strategies:

- Develop long-term capacity so that programs remain after seed funding
- Create cross-systems policy that institutionalizes change
- Look for opportunities to integrate service delivery systems
- Obtain buy-in from key constituents including community members, local politicians, school and community leaders, and funders

Use these strategies and others to help your partnership move toward sustainable outcomes and lasting effects.



Action 4: Work towards system integration

Aim for lasting change

You can make wide-reaching, long-term impact by working collaboratively with diverse partners. As you work together in partnership across sectors serving children, youth and families, strive to:

- Identify inefficiencies such as program overlap, duplication of services, and gaps in service within your community
- Uncover rich new opportunities to coordinate practices and policies to improve the experience of the families and youth you serve
- Discover ways to use available dollars more efficiently through sharing staff and other resources

