

## Chapter Six: Disseminating Your Results And Ensuring Continuity

### 6.1 Disseminating Your Results

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## Introduction

You've finally completed your evaluation, and you've got lots of information about your initiative, about the perceptions and practices around your mental health issue in your community.

You can begin by using the information to improve your project, but there are many other people beyond your immediate group members and community partners who would be interested to hear about your results.

Sharing your results with a variety of people, both within and outside your community will help you gain the support and raise the awareness of a broad range of people - far beyond those you were able to reach through the day-to-day operation of your project.

This support and awareness, in turn, will provoke thinking and discussion about the mental health issue you've been working on, which will help you to nourish and maintain your efforts in the community.

This section gives you some guidelines on how to best present evaluation results to various audiences, and how to decide what those audiences will be. We also discuss ways of sustaining the work of your initiative and making it part of the ongoing life of the community.

## 6.1 Disseminating Your Results

### What is Dissemination?

Dissemination is the process of communicating the lessons learned from the project and evaluation to relevant audiences in a way that is timely, honest and consistent. It means getting

the word out to all those who were involved in and supported your project. The strategy you'll use to disseminate your results should be designed in advance with your stakeholders and community partners.

### **Why Disseminate Your Results?**

It's important to share the learnings of your mental health promotion project with as many different audiences as possible. Disseminating information about your project, including your evaluation findings, helps to:

- provoke thinking and discussion about the issues you're working on;
- encourage others to take action on the issue;
- attract volunteers, funding and in-kind resources from local citizens and agencies;
- maintain and renew interest and commitment to your project;
- raise the profile of your efforts, and lets people know what you've been doing to improve the quality of life for people in your community;
- establish a network of people and agencies with similar goals;
- encourage community partnerships to promote mental health.

### **Who Are Your Audiences?**

Those who have supported your work in the community should be the first to know about your findings. Volunteers, funders, and others who have contributed to your efforts need to be kept up-to-date on your group's efforts and successes.

Sharing your results beyond the individuals and groups immediately involved in your efforts will help to raise interest and awareness of your mental health issue more widely. Some of the key groups that you might want to share your findings with will include:

- civic organizations;
- grassroots and advocacy organizations;
- business groups;
- church groups;
- the local press;
- health and social service agencies;
- elected and appointed local government officials;
- funding agencies.

### **How Do You Get The Word Out?**

The best way to begin your dissemination strategy is to identify a variety of different avenues for getting the word out about your project. Some of these may include:

- **giving presentations** - to community members, local agencies, local politicians, civic and business groups, service clubs, etc;
- **working with the media** - newspapers, radio and television;

- **other ways of getting the word out:**
  - writing reports
  - creating newsletters
  - using the internet to create a website for your project,
  - accessing professional journals by collaborating with university or college based research teams.

In this section we explore the different avenues of dissemination, so that you can decide on the best way to get the word out about your mental health promotion project.

The plan for disseminating the final results of the Inclusion project was built in from the very beginning, and was included in the initial project proposal. A substantial component of the project itself involved documenting the experiences of the project as it unfolded in different communities.

In the 'Guide to Local Action', the resource guide developed by the participants and project staff, each site presented its own discussion of how the participants felt they had done in reaching the goals they set for themselves, as well as the overall goals set by CMHA National.

The guide tells the story of the different communities as a way to encourage others to create their own inclusion projects. Each site's section included participants' own reflections on their work: what worked, what didn't and why. These reflections form the basis of the broader analysis of the common issues raised in the sites. Each site also includes a short synopsis of the results of its Inclusion project.

A Guide to Local Action was distributed nationally to CMHA Branches and Divisions, as well as many other community groups. The inclusion project was featured in several newsletters, such as Community Action, the magazine of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, CMHA branch and division news-letters, and consumer/survivor newsletters.

## **Giving Presentations**

Presenting information on your project in person can be a very effective way of getting the word out. You can tailor the information and the style of your presentation so that it is interesting to a variety of different audiences.

Thinking through the goals of your presentation will also help you to plan effectively. What do you hope to achieve through your presentation? How can you best present your information to get those results?

Here is a list of potential goals for your presentation:

- money and in-kind donations for your project;
- volunteers for project activities;
- input on how to make your initiative more responsive;
- influence in changing a program, policy or practice;
- overcoming resistance to your initiative;
- ideas on how the initiative can be more effective.

It's best to develop a presentation format that can be lengthened or shortened depending on the amount of time available, and type of audience you will be presenting to. Remember to include information on:

- the mental health issue your project addressed;

- the goals and strategies of your initiative;
- the events and activities that your group carried out;
- your group's accomplishments;
- the outcomes of your efforts.

There are a variety of formats you can use to present your information. Depending on the goals of the presentation, and the crowd you'll be addressing, you can choose the one that best suits your needs. Here are a few suggestions of different approaches you could use:

**Formal presentations** are most affective and appropriate when you are addressing a large group, or a group that you haven't yet developed a relationship with. A formal presentation doesn't have to be a lecture, even if you will be doing most of the talking. Engage people's interest by using audiovisuals and other graphics.

**Casual, conversational presentations** would work well with smaller groups, and with those who are already familiar with the efforts or your initiative. Involve your audience by making your presentation interactive, and by arranging the seats in a circle instead of in rows.

**Mentoring** is an alternative way of presenting information on your project. Mentoring involves sharing the results and learnings of your project with other communities in order to stimulate people to develop unique initiatives.

You could invite people in an interested community to visit your project, and learn about your mental health promotion efforts on site. In this way, you could begin to establish mentoring relationships that will stimulate new ideas and innovations in your own and other communities.

## **Tips For Presenting Your Results Effectively**

### **Understand your audience**

What information does a particular audience need, and why do they need it? Try to understand the audience's viewpoint, and be sure to make the presentation to them in time for it to be useful.

### **Have a key spokesperson from your group present your findings**

Make sure the person who your group selects knows your project inside and out, and took part in the evaluation. The presenter should be at ease in front of a group as well as comfortable with the content of the presentation.

### **Ask someone from outside your group to present your findings**

Some audiences may initially be less than receptive to your findings, especially if they are critical of their group. If you are presenting to a challenging group (e.g. particularly uninformed or potentially hostile), it might be helpful to have someone from outside your initiative relay your findings. You try to get a member of that group on side and ask them to present the information.

### **Repeat key information**

Hearing important information more than once will help your audience to better understand your findings.

### **Keep your cool**

You may be confronted by difficult audience who does not immediately recognize the value of your efforts. Do your best to remain calm, professional and cordial.

## **Working With The Media**

If you want to expand the number of people who know what you're doing, you need to get noticed. This usually means working with the media. Besides informing a larger public, the media can empower people, nudge politicians, and add momentum to your mental health promotion initiative.

When you understand the media, you can mental health public issues that are being ignored, and reframe those issues from a citizen's perspective. Be careful, however, if you are not used to dealing with the media. Some journalists may look for stories rooted in conflict, and may impose a confrontational agenda that can actually make it more difficult to move ahead with your mental health issue.

The following are some suggestions to help you make contact with local media, and work with journalists to share the results of your project.

### **Find the media professionals in your community**

Seek help from the people in your community who work for newspapers, radio and television stations. They can provide advice on what is newsworthy, how to get attention, and who to call.

### **Assemble a list of sympathetic journalists who care about community building**

Note their deadlines so you can call after a deadline.

### **Issue news releases**

Send out a news release if you have fresh information you wish to publicize.

- Create your own letterhead, and send out your news releases on this letterhead with "For immediate release" and the date written at the top of the page.
- Create a strong newspaper-like headline that will interest an editor who has to shuffle through hundreds of news releases every day.
- The first sentence should contain the most important fact in your story. The rest of the release should cover the essentials of who, what, where, when and why. Don't forget to include a contact name and phone number for more information.
- Keep the whole thing short - 1-2 pages double-spaced. For big events send out a news release seven days prior, then telephone a reminder a few days before the event takes place. It's best to send a release after having made personal contact with the person who will be receiving it. For more on preparing press releases, see the Community Tool Box, Chapter 4, Section 2: Preparing press releases <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctb/c4/c4s2>

### **Organize a media event**

A press conference is a media event in which you essentially present a statement, answer questions or make announcements to a group of people who represent different media outlets. Press conferences can be helpful in getting the word out quickly, to a broad audience. To generate interest, invite some high profile community members and local politicians to attend the event. For more on press conferences, see Community Tool Box Chapter 4, Section 7: Arranging a press conference <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctb/c4/c4s7>

## **Tips For Working With The Media**

### **Define your objective, then your message**

Don't rush off to the media without a clear idea of what you want to accomplish. Have a set of clear messages ready that you wish to project. If you intend to air a problem, one of your messages should suggest a reasonable solution.

### **Make actions newsworthy**

To get media attention you need to tell a good story with a human focus which is happening now. The more creative, colourful and humorous, the better your coverage will tend to be. Getting noticed is largely a matter of dramatizing the issue.

### **Link your actions to other news events**

Your actions will stand a better chance of being covered if they tie into other events in the news: holidays, local festivals, conferences, mental health week, government announcements, world events, hot issues, etc.

### **Don't rely on the media to educate**

The mass media prefer to entertain. If you want to get out detailed information, you will probably have to do it yourself through newsletters and bulletins.

### **Practice your blurb**

For regular TV and radio news you will have 15-30 seconds to make a statement. Practice what you want to say before the event!

### **Be honest with reporters**

It's essential that any spokesperson for your group to have credibility with the press. Be sure to answer questions simply and candidly, and if you can't answer a certain question, explain why you can't, and tell them you will try to find out the information and get back to them. Most reporters will appreciate your honesty.

### **Try to get on live radio and TV shows**

If you can get on a live show you will actually shape the news, because you won't be edited as you would on regular pre-recorded shows, or in the newspaper. Choose a good spokesperson, who has thought in advance about what they want to say.

### **Write a Letter to the Editor**

Writing a letter to the editor of a small, community-run newspaper is an easy way to get publicity. Small papers will publish almost any reasonable letter that doesn't require a lot of fact checking.

### **Take advantage of other kinds of announcement.**

Community bulletin boards run by local radio and cable stations will often announce your event. Public service announcements (PSA's) on radio and TV offer another opportunity. Contact specific stations for details.

### **Consider alternative media**

Buttons, window signs, posters, notices in laundromats.. these are all great ways of getting the word out.

To promote the project more widely, Helping Skills staff issued media releases at strategic points -- when the volunteers had completed their training and were beginning to work in their communities, and when the project was wrapping up, participants reflected on the experience of using their new skills. It was the volunteers that the media wanted to talk to, and several agreed to interviews that were widely broadcast.

Staff also organized an open house and news conference to announce the granting of phase 4 of the project, which was attended by the Provincial Minister of Health and the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, both of whom made statements applauding the program.

## **Other Ways Of Getting The Word Out**

### **Writing reports**

Your final report can be a short document summarizing the evaluation findings with an appendix for those who are interested, or a longer, more detailed report that covers all aspects of the project, much like a funding proposal. Depending on your audience, you may simply want to highlight the results, or you may want to go into more detail about what you found.

For a formal report, for funders or other community partners, begin with a summary of your project, addressing the following information:

- a statement of the problem, goal, or opportunity your project addresses;
- a description of the community context, which lists the important features of your community, including social and economic conditions, history, geography, politics, descriptions of previous attempts to address the issue, etc;
- your expectations, or your project's intended results;
- project activities, or everything that was done to bring about changes;
- project resources - the time, human and financial and in-kind resources, and other assets available to conduct program activities;

Following the summary, list the reasons your evaluation was done, what questions were asked, and why those were the questions chosen. Explain what your group wanted to learn from the evaluation and what methods were used to conduct the evaluation.

If you are writing a report for your funder, make sure to consult their guidelines. They may have a particular format they would like you to follow in presenting your results.

### **Creating newsletters**

Newsletters are great tools for communicating information about your project both internally and externally. You can create your own newsletter, or use the networks of another group, and write an article in their newsletter.

A well-designed and written newsletter will show how well-organized your group is, and will help keep your members and colleagues up-to-date on your activities.

Newsletters can be particularly helpful in disseminating information about your project because they can reach a broad audience, but they do take money and skill to do well. For more information on creating newsletters, please see the Community Tool Box, Chapter 4, Section 9: Newsletters people will read. <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctb/c4/c4s9/>

### **Using the internet**

The internet is gaining importance daily as a means of sharing information and gaining publicity. The internet is an indispensable resource for community projects for several reasons: it provides an access to a great deal of free and low-cost information that will help you implement your project; and it provides an almost unlimited network for you to use to get the word out about your project.

Local high school and college students may have the skills necessary to help you set up a website for your project for next to nothing. Get in touch with teachers and students to find out if they can help you get your project on-line.

### **Accessing professional journals**

If you have been collaborating with community college or university-based researchers, you might be interested in working with them to write an article for a professional journal, which would help you to share your results with the academic community.

In addition to contributing to the Guide to Local Action, the participants in each Inclusion site also focused on creating their own dissemination networks, to communicate information about their individual project both within their own community and beyond.

The dissemination strategy developed in each site reflected the uniqueness of their particular project. The Forest site used several strategies to disseminate their learnings. They took their show on the road to neighbouring communities, where they shared their role plays with a variety of different groups, and they also produced a video of the role plays, so that it could be sent out to communities that they couldn't visit in person.

## **6.2 Ensuring Continuity**

Planning for continuity and sustainability means more than simply keeping your project going, it also refers to the practices, values and relationships that become permanently entrenched in individuals, groups, organizations, and the community at large as a result of your project. It ensures that the positive changes your project has brought about will have a lasting effect.

### **Why Should You Ensure Continuity?**

Seeing the work your project has accomplished flourish and continue in your community is undoubtedly one of your goals. You have worked hard to organize, gather information and resources, raise awareness and interest, and make positive change in your community. You have created something of value, and you don't want to see it disappear.

### **How Do You Ensure Continuity?**

Your goal in planning for continuity is to convince people and institutions to make long-term commitments to promoting mental health, a concept that is not easily reducible to tangible products and services.

That means you have to take a step back from the daily details of running your project and look at the big picture. This will allow you to compile some solid evidence that your efforts are worth people's continued support.

Answering the following questions will help your group prepare to approach people in your community and beyond to begin or renew their support for your efforts.

### **What have you accomplished to far?**

It's a good time to step back and survey how far you've come. By seeing your successes and reexamining your mistakes, you will better understand where you are and where you're going.

### **Is the community behind your efforts to sustain the initiative?**

Is there ongoing enthusiasm and excitement about your project in the community? Do community members feel strongly enough to continue to support your efforts?

### **Have your goals and objectives changed?**

Your group came together originally because you wanted to take action on a certain mental health issue in your community. Is your group still pursuing the same goal? Has the focus of your project shifted?

You might need to re-examine your objectives at this point, to see if they are consistent with your current focus and activities.

### **How have you promoted your efforts?**

What kind of publicity has your project received? Who knows about you? What have you done to spread the word about your efforts?

### **How is your initiative structured?**

Do you have a number of committed members? Do you have regular meetings? Have you developed policies about how meetings should run?

Once you've answered all these questions, you'll be prepared to approach a variety of people and organizations to ask them to work with you to sustain the work your initiative has accomplished.

### **Who Can You Work With To Ensure Continuity?**

Disseminating your findings broadly not only ensures that your mental health promotion project has high visibility in the community and beyond, but it also helps to ensure that your project continues beyond the funding or pilot period, and becomes a part of the life of the community.

There are several potential sources of support, including local citizens' associations and institutions, that can play a role in establishing your initiative as a part of community life.

#### **Citizen associations**

One way of ensuring that your initiative has an ongoing identity and presence in the community is to become associated with a recognized citizen organization. This association could also result in additional funding for your group. A variety of citizen groups already exist in most communities, including service clubs such as Rotary and Kiwanis, local business associations such as the Chamber of Commerce, and self-help groups.

By affiliating with a local citizen association, your mental health promotion project could benefit enormously from the credibility and connections that that association has developed in the community. It would allow your project to gain committed and growing support from within an established organization, while at the same time not jeopardizing the non-service orientation of mental health promotion efforts.

### **Service agencies**

Organizations such as health and social service agencies can also be powerful community partners. They often have access to many networks and resources that could benefit your project, and could themselves benefit greatly from the learnings of your project.

There are, however, a number of caveats to forming these relationships. Professional service systems are designed to facilitate professional-client relationships. While these relationships are useful in many circumstances, they do not reflect a mental health promotion approach, in which people define and control the methods and direction of community work. The agency may want the initiative to be staffed by one of its professionals, a move that might open the door for service-oriented methods to take over the community development approaches that are integral to mental health promotion efforts.

If you plan to affiliate with local institutions, you will need to make a special effort to use the language and methods of mental health promotion and to avoid the language and methods of agencies and services.

The Community Health Boards, the primary community partner in the Helping Skills project, recognized the value of the informal capacity building dimension of the project. At the end of the pilot, both of the Health Boards made the commitment of resources to sustain the existing groups and deliver further training.

The participants who became involved in Phase 4 of the Helping Skills program had clear ideas of how they would use their learning upon returning to their agencies. This indicated the commitment of these agencies to implementing the project.

There were community mental health workers who planned to share their new skills with volunteers and clients. There were public health nurses who planned to deliver the program to other rural nurses. There was a prison social worker who would offer the training to prison guards. In this way, the learnings of the project became a part of the culture of a variety of community associations and institutions.

### **Summary**

Disseminating your results is an essential part of implementing your mental health promotion project. Sharing your results broadly is beneficial to your project in many ways.

Community partners should be involved in helping to plan a dissemination strategy early in the life of the project. You can access the networks of your community partners to help you

disseminate your results.

You can communicate your results in a variety of ways, according to the background and interests of your audience. The format and content of your presentation can be adapted, to ensure that it is relevant and appropriate for your audience.

The relationships that are created over the course of your mental health promotion project will continue for as long as benefit all the partners involved. In all of the sample projects, many participants continue to contribute time, energy and resources to the project, although the funded, pilot stage has ended.

Planning for sustainability is a process that should be a part of the overall planning of the project, Planning is important because it focuses on the set of steps that you will need to go through to reach your ultimate goal, a lasting improvement in people's mental health.

To ensure that your mental health promotion initiative maintains its identity as citizen-guided, rather than service-oriented, affiliate with community organizations that share a community-building orientation.

## **Tips For Disseminating Your Findings And Ensuring Continuity**

### **So what?**

Be sure to explain what kind of implications your results will have both for your group, for the community at large, and beyond.

### **What do you want me to do about it?**

If your evaluation results have led you to any particular conclusions or recommendations about what your group or others should do in the future, explain how you arrived at your conclusions.

### **Prove it!**

Support your recommendations with evidence gathered through your evaluation. Pithy quotes from participants can be just as powerful an indication of success as numbers.

### **Use your networks**

Your community partners and stakeholders have their own networks of connections. Ask them to help you get in touch with as broad an audience as possible by piggybacking on their networks.

### **Anticipate people's questions, concerns and objections**

Think ahead about how a particular audience might react to your findings. Be prepared to respond with calm, logical, thoughtful and thorough answers to their questions and concerns.

### **Give your results to the right people**

You don't want all your hard work to end up buried under a pile of papers on the wrong person's desk. When you're sending out the report, put it to the attention of a particular person, and follow-up to see that they received it.

### **Address issues which those people will find important**

Make sure to take into consideration the type of group you're information to and tailor your presentation to that audience.

### **Present the information in time for it to be useful**

If you wait too long to inform people, they will lose interest. Get the word out while there's still a buzz happening, and while it's fresh in people's minds. Sometimes funders require a report within certain amount of time after the funding period ends. Make sure to stick to that date.

### **Make sure the information is clear and easily understood**

Present your information in such a way that someone who had never previously heard of your project would understand. Avoid using jargon, and tell the story clearly, beginning with a summary of the project.

### **Get the support of community leaders.**

Having credible, high profile community leaders behind your project will go a long way towards getting your efforts noticed and welcomed as a part of the life of your community.

## **Checklist**

- You have organized your evaluation data in a clear and straight forward manner that will be easily understood even by those who are unfamiliar with your project.
- You have supported the-conclusions drawn from your findings with evidence.
- You have shared your results with your members, community partners and stakeholders.
- You have used your community networks to disseminate your results broadly
- You have used a variety of mediums and methods to disseminate the learnings of your project.
- You have gained the commitment and support of community leaders.
- Your group has reviewed its goals, objectives and accomplishments, and feels that your project continues to be relevant and beneficial to the community
- Your community perceives the need for and supports your efforts to sustain your project.
- You have contacted a number of local citizen associations and community agencies to discuss ways of sustaining your project.

## **Annotated Resource List**

**Community tool box.** Chapter 32, Section 3: Communicating information about the initiative to gain support from key audiences. Hampton, C. <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctb/c32/c32s3>

Contains straightforward and practical information on how to communicate evaluation results strategically to benefit your initiative.

**Community tool box.** Chapter 25, Section 2: Making friends with the media. Whitman, A. <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctb/c25s2>

This section of the Community Tool Box provides information on how to develop a positive relationship with the media that will benefit your project. It gives a list of the pros and cons of different mediums to help you choose the best to increase the public's awareness of your group.

**Community tool box.** Chapter 36, Section I : Planning for the institutionalization of an initiative. Krammer, R. <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/ctb/c25s2>

This section of the Community tool box discusses the considerations and issues that are part of planning to sustain a community initiative over the long run.

**Media advocacy and public health: Power for prevention.** Wallack, L. et al. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993.

This book considers media advocacy a blend of science, politics and activism that produces responsible media coverage and social revolution. It presents skills and strategies that serve community interests, especially in community health.

**Prime time activism: Media strategies for grassroots organizing.** Ryan, C. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1991.

PrimeTime Activism analyzes why grassroots organizations have a hard time gaining a hearing in mainstream media. It details how mainstream media's addiction to sound bites, their criteria of newsworthiness, their daily news gathering routines and their professional training and values marginalize grassroots groups while favouring powerful institutions.

The author brings many years of practical experience to her topic and stresses a long-term media strategy for grassroots organizations. The book includes information on areas such as: planning a media strategy, mainstream notions of what's newsworthy, how to create news leads, and how to get into reporters' "golden rolodex". Ryan effectively shows how developing a long-term relationship with a reporter can provide insight into the reporter's slant, and therefore assist groups in getting the story "spin" they want to achieve their objectives.