
A Framework for Community Mobilization to Promote Healthy Youth Development

Jomella Watson-Thompson, PhD, Stephen B. Fawcett, PhD, Jerry A. Schultz, PhD

Abstract: In community mobilization to prevent youth violence, local people take action to create conditions under which youth are healthy and safe. This manuscript outlines a framework for supporting and evaluating community mobilization to promote healthy youth development as an approach to preventing youth violence. The framework highlights 12 key community processes to facilitate change and improvement. A descriptive case study of the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council Youth Project (INCYP) is used to illustrate the application of this framework in an inner-city, predominantly African-American neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri. Data are presented on community change (i.e., new or modified programs, policies, and practices) facilitated by the INCYP between 2001 and 2003, as an intermediate measure used to assess the mobilization effort. The INCYP facilitated 26 community changes during the project period, and was an effective catalyst for mobilizing the community to support change in outcomes and conditions that support healthy youth development. This case study suggests the importance of early and ongoing engagement of youth as change agents in the community mobilization effort.

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Introduction

Since the late 1980s, concern has been growing about youth violence in the United States¹ and its social and economic costs. In 2004, homicide was still the second leading cause of death for youth aged 10 to 24 years, and the leading cause of death for African Americans.² In 2005, individuals under the age of 25 accounted for nearly 45% of all arrests for violent crimes and 50% of arrests for murder.²

Youth violence is a complex issue that stems from individual, relationship, community, and societal factors.³ Multiple personal and environmental factors affect youth violence.³ In urban areas characterized by concentrated poverty, youth may be exposed to risk factors such as community disorganization.^{4,5} In an ecological view, single intervention approaches are seen as minimally effective because multiple and inter-related factors contribute to this and related problems.^{3,5} There is also growing evidence that social connectedness, or social ties among people, are a protective factor inversely associated with rates of crime at the community level.⁶

Community mobilization—people coming together to take action on an issue—can enhance social connectedness and efficacy or the ability to have influence

and control over the environment.^{7,8} Engaging youth in planning and community action is a promising approach for community mobilization for change and healthy youth development.⁹ Local youth and adults working to address youth violence can counter a low sense of efficacy or capacity to exert influence on the environment. When at-risk youth help to define the community problems and solutions, it can help give them a sense of ownership, responsibility, and empowerment.⁹

Since the 1980s, community partnerships have been emerging as a strategy for addressing complex and multifaceted societal concerns, including the prevention of youth violence.^{10,11} Although the influence of community partnerships is recognized, the “community” is more often viewed as an immutable risk factor than as a mobilizer for change.¹ Youth are too often perceived as the source of the problem, rather than potentially valuable contributors to problem solving.⁹

Documented evidence of the capacity of community mobilization efforts to facilitate community change and improvement related to youth violence is limited.¹⁰ Many community mobilization efforts have not shown a significant decrease in targeted indicators (e.g., rates of crime), largely because broader environmental conditions (e.g., economic inequalities) associated with levels of violence are inadequately addressed.¹² Because a significant investment of time and resources is often required to improve population-level outcomes, studies that use interme-

From the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Jomella Watson-Thompson, PhD, 1000 Sunnyside Avenue, 4082 Dole Center, University of Kansas, Lawrence KS 66045. Email: jomellaw@ku.edu.

diate outcome measures may enhance understanding of the contribution of community mobilization efforts in preventing youth violence.¹¹

A public health approach to violence prevention focuses on “what we as a society do collectively to assure conditions in which people can be healthy.”¹³ In community mobilization efforts, people who share a common place or experience plan and take action together. Collaborative public health efforts engage people from multiple sectors in changing community conditions that can effect widespread changes in behavior and related outcomes.

This manuscript provides a framework for supporting and evaluating community mobilization efforts to create conditions that prevent youth violence and promote healthy youth development. It presents an integrative case study to illustrate five phases with twelve related processes to support community mobilization. The case study conveys collaborative efforts in a predominantly African-American low-income inner-city neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri.

Context and Framework for Community Mobilization Efforts

Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council Youth Project

The setting for this case study is a community partnership in the Ivanhoe neighborhood, a symptomatically older declining neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri. In the mid 1990s, the worsening conditions of the neighborhood, from gang violence and drug infiltration, resulted in new neighborhood leaders and a renewed neighborhood organization, the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council (INC). In 2000, neighborhood health and safety was threatened by a multitude of risk factors, including concentrated poverty, low educational attainment, and high levels of morbidity (e.g., 50% above the national average in major diagnostic categories).

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, a Kansas City-based philanthropy, invited the INC to be part of the “healthy neighborhood” strategy that focused on improving outcomes of youth by building and enhancing their immediate environment through comprehensive youth development. The Kauffman Foundation requested the assistance of the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas (KUWG) to provide technical assistance and evaluation support. The goal of the technical assistance was to enhance local capacities to facilitate, implement, and evaluate environmental changes (i.e., new or modified programs, policies, or practices) in the community. The basic framework presented in this manuscript guided the collaborative effort.

A Framework for Community Mobilization and Change Efforts

This section outlines a conceptual framework for community efforts to change and improve youth and community health. Derived from work in health promotion,^{7,14} the Institute of Medicine (IOM)⁸ used this framework to characterize collaborative community public health action in its report on the future of public health in the 21st century. Figure 1 presents this five-component framework: (1) assessment and collaborative planning, (2) targeted action and intervention, (3) community change, (4) widespread behavior change, and (5) improvement in population-level outcomes. Each component will be described and illustrated with a case example from the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council Youth Project (INCYP).

As shown in Figure 1, this theory of community action is both iterative and interactive. For example, assessment and collaborative planning should help determine appropriate forms of community action and support the implementation of community change. The implementation of community change and the attainment of improvements in more distal outcomes should result in a renewed cycle of collaborative planning.

Twelve key processes, integrated with the IOM framework, help to operationalize the implementation of the framework (Figure 1).¹⁵ Emerging empirical evidence suggests that the 12 processes may be important for enhancing the capacity of local communities to facilitate change and improvement.¹¹

Community Assessment and Collaborative Planning

Assessment and collaborative planning can enhance the capacity of community mobilization efforts to facilitate positive change and improvement (Figure 1).⁷ An assessment of community needs and resources is part of the process of *analyzing information*. Working together, community members and outside experts obtain and use quantitative data¹⁴ and qualitative information on community concerns to identify important issues that will be the focus of mobilization and change efforts. In a multisectoral approach, representatives from different sectors of the community—such as schools, business, and faith communities—share resources and responsibilities in the ongoing process of assessment and collaborative planning.

The process of *establishing a vision and mission* ensures agreement on a common purpose to help gather support and unite group efforts.^{11,16} A clear *organizational structure and operating mechanism* enhances institutional supports for change efforts by identifying the explicit roles and responsibilities of collaborative partners and organizational leaders.

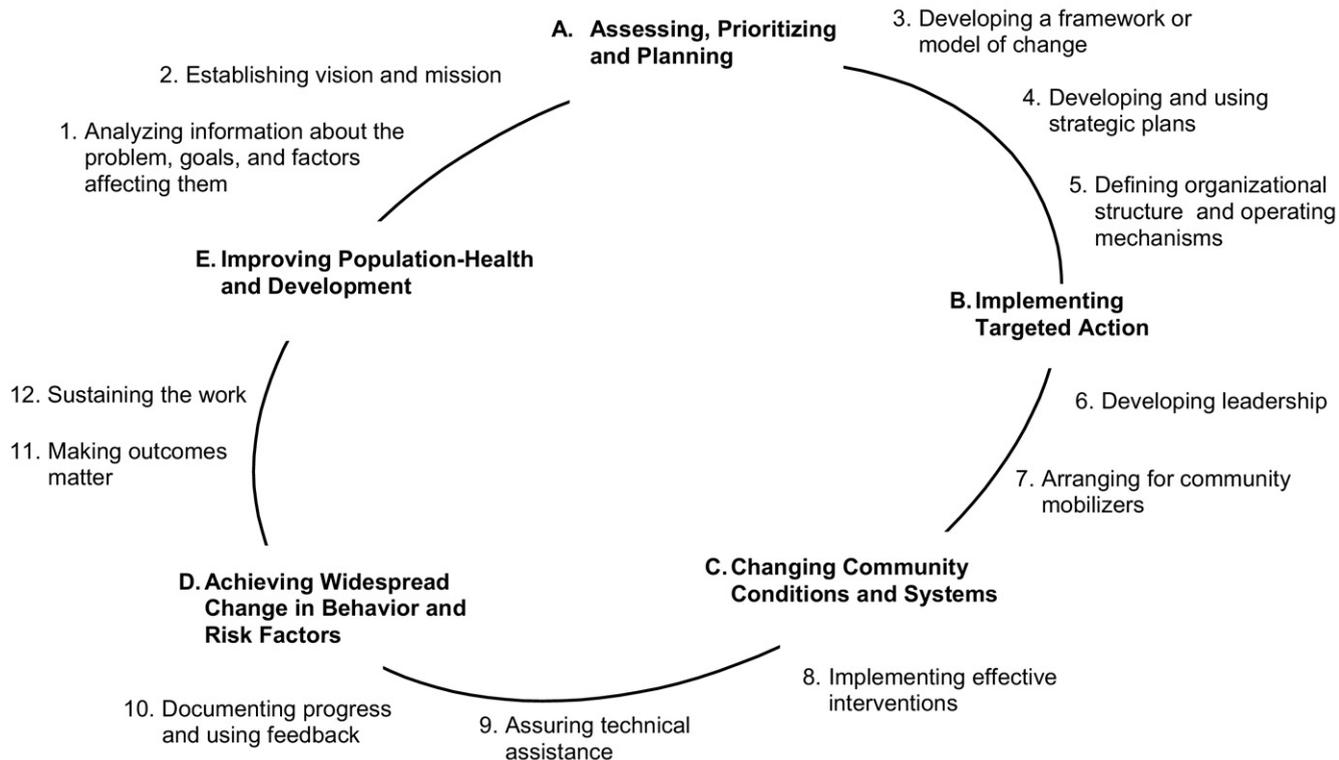


Figure 1. A framework and 12 associated processes for community mobilization to promote healthy youth development. Source: Adapted from Fawcett et al., 2000; Institute of Medicine, 2003.

This process enables the group to be accountable and productive in facilitating its mission.¹⁶

The process of *developing a clear framework* helps explicate the effort’s approach. It guides the pathway from “here” (current conditions of youth violence) to “there” (vision for a safe neighborhood), facilitating change and improvement in population-level outcomes.⁷

Developing and using strategic plans further outlines how the community can move from vision and mission to attaining objectives. Planning should include all those most affected by the issue (e.g., youth and low-income parents who may traditionally lack power), as well as those in a position to effect needed changes (e.g., peers or leaders in business and government). The process of strategic planning should result in products that guide community mobilization, including a shared: (1) vision—what success would look like (e.g., “safe communities”), (2) mission—statement of what the group is going to do and why, (3) objectives—how much of what (e.g., reduced prevalence of fighting) will result by when, (4) strategies—how the effort will reach its objectives,² and (5) action plans—specific community changes to be sought and interventions to be implemented, including who will do what by when.¹¹

Case example. In February 1999, 71 neighborhood residents participated in the FOCUS Neighborhood Assessment, a planning process initiated by the Kansas City, Missouri Department of Planning and Develop-

ment. The assessment included a basic analysis of neighborhood data (e.g., housing, crime), assets (e.g., churches, block clubs), and challenges (e.g., drugs, abandoned houses, youth programs). Neighborhood residents used this information to identify broad goals, including (1) elimination of criminal activity in the neighborhood, particularly related to illegal drugs and (2) increased youth programs and services. The INC and the Kauffman Foundation adopted the IOM framework to help guide the collaborative effort. As shown in **Figure 1**, the framework supported the collaborative partnership in an iterative process from assessment and planning to the implementation of community action, community change, and improvements in neighborhood conditions.

In 2000, the INC began its first neighborhood strategic planning process, with support from the Kauffman Foundation and KUWG. A strategic planning workshop engaged approximately 85 residents and community partners (e.g., faith-based organizations, government officials), including both youth and adults. The participants created a vision for the neighborhood (“Thriving Neighborhoods in Harmony”) and a mission (“Building clean, beautiful, safe, thriving neighborhoods for healthy families and youth through trusting cooperative relationships”). Through a one-year strategic planning process, the INC developed its first comprehensive strategic plan, which identified crime,

safety, family, and youth development as prioritized goals. For each goal, specific objectives, strategies, and action steps were developed. For example, the goal of youth development had specific (1) objectives (e.g., by December 2002, there will be a 25% increase in youth and young adults participating in INC activities), (2) strategies (e.g., develop a youth group to engage neighborhood youth in planning and implementing community initiatives to address youth-identified neighborhood needs), and (3) action steps (e.g., work with adult block captains to identify and recruit neighborhood youth leaders).

The INC developed action committees, consisting of neighborhood residents and partnering organizations, to support implementation of the strategic plan. A Family and Youth Development Committee addressed issues related to healthy youth development, which the group recognized as a protective factor for preventing youth-related violence. Initially, the Family and Youth Development Committee primarily engaged adult residents and community partners. Shortly thereafter, the committee facilitated the development of a youth organization, the Ivanhoe Youth Council, to help ensure youth engagement in neighborhood change and improvement. Neighborhood youth aged 12 to 18 years were recruited to participate. However, an ongoing challenge was maintaining the participation of youth 15 years and older. (Although 10- to 12-year-olds asked to participate, they did not meet the age criteria.)

In July 2002, a focus group of 16 neighborhood youth (12–18 years old) and community partners (including a youth pastor and a youth substance abuse counselor) met to develop a complementary youth-facilitated strategic plan for the Ivanhoe Youth Council. The strategic planning sessions were facilitated by a graduate research assistant affiliated with KUWG. The youth participated in three sessions in which they identified youth-defined community issues and concerns and developed a strategic plan. The mission statement developed by the Ivanhoe Youth Council was “To build a fun, safe, unified community of loving, dedicated, and caring individuals through determined, strong-minded and positive youth.” To guide the youth-led effort, the Ivanhoe Youth Council also developed specific (1) objectives (e.g., by July 2004, there will be a 20% increase in neighborhood activities for Ivanhoe youth to positively interact), (2) strategies (e.g., establish a weekly after-school program, the Ivanhoe Life-Learning Institute, for neighborhood youth leaders), and (3) action steps (e.g., survey the youth to identify topics of interest and needs for skill development).

The INCYP encompassed the comprehensive efforts of both the Family and Youth Development Committee and the Ivanhoe Youth Council. Its aim was to facilitate community change and improvement in youth outcomes through the implementation of the complemen-

tary strategic plans. The Committee and the Youth Council coordinated roles, responsibilities, and resources to support collaborative action and change for youth in the neighborhood. The Committee provided oversight and guidance to the Youth Council in developing and implementing the youth-determined plan. The executive director of the INC provided administrative support for the INCYP. The group established collaborative partnerships with other organizations, particularly the National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependency (NCADD), Front Porch Alliance (a faith-based neighborhood organization), Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church, and KUWG. This provided an operational structure and support system for the INCYP.

Implementing Targeted Action

Community mobilization is often expressed as targeted actions (e.g., individual or group advocacy efforts) to bring about changes identified in the strategic plan. *Developing leadership* (Figure 1) is a pivotal process that enhances individual and collective capacity to mobilize for change and improvement.¹¹ Community residents and organizations are engaged in dispersed leadership roles (e.g., as board members, community volunteers, committee chairs, block contacts) that promote ownership and responsibility of the mobilization effort.¹⁶ *Arranging for community mobilizers* helps to enhance leadership capacity by ensuring support for systematic implementation of the strategic plan and the facilitation of community change.¹¹

Case example. The INCYP initiated targeted action and intervention by implementing the integrated strategic plans, and facilitated a bottom-up approach to community mobilization through leadership development and governance by adult and youth residents. The INCYP provided training for neighborhood residents, including youth, to serve as committee chairs and block contacts. The organization arranged for a paid community mobilizer, responsible for training and supporting 5 committee chairs and over 80 adult block contacts. The mobilizer worked with block contacts and action committees, including the Family and Youth Committee, to support healthy youth development through targeted changes in broader environmental conditions (i.e., crime and safety, family and youth development, neighborhood beautification, housing, and economic development). The Family and Youth Committee chair, a longstanding resident with access to neighborhood youth, helped mobilize and recruit youth for the INCYP.

The INC also brokered relationships with partnering organizations, including NCADD and KUWG, to work as project organizers with the Ivanhoe community mobilizer and the Family and Youth Committee chair. The project organizers worked with the INCYP in

training and supporting 30 neighborhood youth of the Ivanhoe Youth Council, including 15 junior (youth) block contacts responsible for mobilizing other youth through block-level organizing and action (e.g., developing youth block plans). The INCYP also worked with the community mobilizer to provide opportunities for youth leaders and block contacts to plan and implement neighborhood-wide youth mobilization efforts (e.g., recruiting youth volunteers, canvassing the neighborhood, and working with police to organize the neighborhood's first National Night Out Against Crime, an annual drug and crime prevention event).

Community Change

In this context, community change¹⁷ refers to instances of new or modified (1) programs (e.g., mentoring program), (2) policies (e.g., speed limit enforcement in areas unsafe for youth), or (3) practices (e.g., hiring of neighborhood youth for summer employment), facilitated by the mobilization effort and related to the mission. Community change is an intermediate outcome, between collaborative planning and action and the more distant changes in behaviors and population-level outcomes.⁷

Community mobilization efforts are often facilitated as comprehensive or multicomponent community interventions consisting of a series of community changes (i.e., new or modified programs, policies, or practices). The community mobilization effort in itself may be considered an intervention (or community change) that yields more targeted intervention components (e.g., mentoring program, life-skill training; see Table 1). Community efforts may adapt and implement specific interventions, such as mentoring programs. The process of *implementing effective interventions* ensures that program components are adapted to fit community context, conditions, and needs.¹⁵ *Assuring technical assistance* can enhance the capacity of the community by making available necessary resources (e.g., community facilitator, researcher) and supports (e.g., facilitation of community activities, tools for community assessment). Technical assistance can strengthen individual and community capacity by enhancing core skills and knowledge needed to implement targeted interventions (i.e., new programs and policies) effectively.^{11,16}

The process of *documenting progress and providing feedback* allows for ongoing assessment of intermediate outcomes (community change) and more distal indicators of success (e.g., lower youth arrest rates, higher high school graduation rates). Systematic documentation and integrated feedback enable analysis of contributions to environmental change by mobilizing people over time and across locations. This process helps to ensure communication of goals, timely adjustments to intervention components, and accountability for improvement in community conditions.

Table 1. Illustrative community changes facilitated by the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council Youth Project

Program Changes

1. The Ivanhoe Life-Learning Institute was implemented for neighborhood youth and provides a weekly after-school program to teach life skills, training for youth-led neighborhood leadership opportunities, and mentoring through the Junior Block Captain program.
2. For the first time, the INCYP partnered with the Police Athletic League to implement a 10-week flag football after-school program.
3. Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council partnered with Shalom Baptist Church and Front Porch Alliance to implement a summer youth program for 60 at-risk neighborhood youth.

Policy Changes

1. The Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council Family and Youth Committee formally implemented a policy for both an adult and a youth to serve as committee co-chairs.
2. New collaborative partnership between INCYP and the Streets and Traffic Operation Unit of the City Public Safety Department resulted in a youth-led neighborhood traffic study, neighborhood petition, and implementation of traffic-calming devices in areas of the neighborhood experiencing safety issues.

Practice Changes

1. The Ivanhoe Youth Council and the Front Porch Alliance worked to implement a "Back to School Bash" as a positive alternative summer activity for youth.
2. One Ivanhoe youth was hired by KUWG as an intern to conduct a youth needs assessment.
3. Ivanhoe youth developed the Ivanhoe Youth Council, a subsidiary organization of the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council, and the Ivanhoe Youth Council Action Plan.

INCYP, Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council Youth Project; KUWG, Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.

Case example. Table 1 shows that the INCYP facilitated a number of community changes including new or modified (1) programs, (2) policies, and (3) practices to prevent youth violence. For instance, development of the Ivanhoe Youth Council was a practice change for the INC. Subsequently, the Ivanhoe Youth Council helped to mobilize youth to facilitate a series of community changes including the development of the Ivanhoe Life-Learning Institute (a weekly after-school program), a junior block captain program (an ongoing program that trained and supported youth in developing and implementing block plans), and a neighborhood crime awareness rally. In supporting development of the strategic plan, KUWG worked closely with organizational committees (e.g., Youth Development) to identify and adapt effective intervention components.

The INCYP received ongoing technical assistance from partners, including staff of NCADD and KUWG. The KUWG initially provided this help to support organizational capacity and development (e.g., creating meeting materials for the Ivanhoe Youth Council, providing documentation support) and community-capacity building

activities (e.g., guided strategic planning process, facilitated implementation of programs). A KUWG graduate research assistant and a prevention consultant from NCADD served as project organizers and provided technical assistance and support in (1) developing and providing weekly consultation for the implementation of the Ivanhoe Youth Council and (2) adapting and implementing effective youth development and prevention strategies (e.g., life-skills training, youth leadership training, developmental assets strategies, incentive-based rewards for participation) through the Ivanhoe Life-Learning Institute.

The KUWG also provided technical assistance through such Internet-based supports as the Community Tool Box (ctb.ku.edu), a tool for building capacity for community work. The partnership's efforts were documented using KUWG's Online Documentation and Support System, which was used to collect information about implementation of neighborhood-based interventions. These data were analyzed across key dimensions including: (1) sector in which the change occurred (e.g., faith community), (2) broad type of strategy (e.g., providing information), (3) target group (e.g., children), and (4) location (e.g., neighborhood).

The Youth Committee Chair and the community mobilizer served as the community documenters (primary observers) for the INCYP. They were responsible for recording data in the Online Documentation and Support System. As shown in Table 1, the community documenters recorded discrete instances of community change (i.e., new or modified programs, policies, or practices), an intermediate measure used to assess INCYP's efforts. Staff from KUWG provided training and technical support to individual community documenters. During its regular monthly meetings, the Family and Youth Committee reviewed community changes facilitated by the INCYP to assess implementation of the strategic plan.

Widespread Behavior Change and Improvement in Population-Level Outcomes

The purpose of community mobilization—including collaborative planning and action, and the resulting changes in communities and systems—is improving behavior risk and protective factors and population-level outcomes. For instance, to reduce youth violence, widespread change in targeted behaviors (e.g., fighting, positive engagement with adults) is more likely when community conditions address the array of relevant risk factors (e.g., knowledge and skill) and protective factors (e.g., enhanced peer support and positive adult engagement). To effect behavior changes, specific intervention components (e.g., skills training and social reinforcement from peers and adults) should reflect risk and protective factors related to the behavioral goal.

Community mobilization efforts are outcome-oriented. Change efforts aim to reduce negative outcomes (e.g., fighting) and promote positive development (e.g., increased educational success). Improving a population-level outcome often requires widespread change in multiple behaviors (e.g., bullying, caring engagement) of multiple actors (e.g., youth, parents, neighbors). Community interventions may include both universal approaches (i.e., toward all youth) and targeted strategies, including those to reach individuals with multiple risks (e.g., history of antisocial behavior or substance abuse).

Achieving widespread behavior change and more distal outcomes typically requires a sustained investment of activities and resources. The process of *making outcomes matter* focuses on incentives (e.g., continued grants based on organizational achievement) to increase organizational capacity and effectiveness.¹¹ Improvement in widespread behavior and more distal youth-related outcomes requires the continued engagement of many people (e.g., youth, adults), over time (e.g., many years), and across settings (e.g., neighborhood, city). Accordingly, *sustaining the work* is a critical process that helps to ensure the continued viability of a community mobilization effort by leveraging ongoing human, financial, organizational, and community resources and supports.

Case example. The collaborative INCYP effort worked to implement community change to improve behavior (e.g., youth engagement), associated protective factors (e.g., engagement of non-parent adults), and youth-related outcomes (e.g., decreased youth violence). The implementation of the Ivanhoe Youth Council helped neighborhood youth collaborate to address youth violence in the community (i.e., through peer support, supervised after-school activities, community organization). The INCYP used incentives to strengthen youth mobilization engagement. For instance, after the Ivanhoe Youth Council successfully facilitated a community change (e.g., implementation of a neighborhood crime awareness rally), youth who helped facilitate the effort participated in a positive group outing.

Several strategies helped support the sustainability of the effort, such as leveraging staff support from partners (e.g., NCADD, Front Porch Alliance) to provide direct support in implementing intervention components (e.g., life-skills training). INCYP also actively recruited additional partners (e.g., community members, parents, youth) to further enhance organizational and community capacity to facilitate change. For instance, the INCYP partnered with Front Porch Alliance to implement a "Back-to-School Bash" for neighborhood youth. In January 2003, to continue supporting the INCYP, the INC leveraged additional financial resources to support the KUWG project organizer. In July 2003, youth leadership secured grant funding

through the Kauffman Youth Advisory Board to support implementation of the youth-led strategic plan.

After the formal partnership of the INC, the KUWG, and the Kauffman Foundation ended in December 2002, the INCYP continued to collaborate with both the KUWG and the Kauffman Foundation through renegotiated roles, responsibilities, and funding mechanisms. After the end of its healthy neighborhood strategy, the Kauffman Foundation continued to support limited components of INCYP strategic plan implementation through other grant initiative funding mechanisms, leveraging resources that allowed the project organizer to continue providing consultation for the INCYP through December 2003. Even after the departure of the project organizer, the continued involvement of Ivanhoe youth in neighborhood mobilization efforts was maintained through the efforts of the Family and Youth Development Committee.

Evaluating Community Mobilization Efforts

This framework for community mobilization focuses on (1) critical processes (assessment and collaborative planning), (2) engagements (targeted action and intervention), (3) intermediate outcomes (community and system changes), and (4) more distant outcomes (widespread behavior change, risk and protective factors, and population-level outcomes).

Documenting and Analyzing the Contribution of the Community Change Effort

Since 1990, KUWG and collaborating partners have been studying the process, intermediate outcomes, and more distant population-level outcomes of community efforts to promote health and development.⁷ The same measurement system has been used to document *community change* (new or modified programs, policies, and practices), the product of community mobilization activities.¹⁷ To help ensure data quality, KUWG provided training and measures of inter-observer agreement for scoring discrete instances of community change (e.g., expansion of a new mentoring program in a faith community). Community documenters of the INCYP included the Youth Committee chairperson and the community mobilizer. The measurement system focused on the intermediate outcome of community change, because population-level outcomes were too distant—perhaps taking five years or more to improve—to be useful in making necessary and immediate adjustments in community mobilization efforts.

Results of Key Evaluation Questions

The KUWG and the Kauffman Foundation refined research questions to guide the collaborative youth mobilization effort. Evaluation of the effort focused on

two core questions: (1) Is the community mobilization effort a catalyst for community change related to youth development? and (2) What factors or processes are associated with the rate of community change for the youth community mobilization effort?

The unfolding of community changes facilitated by the INCYP was graphed as a cumulative record to demonstrate the continued development of the initiative (Figure 2). Between May 2001 and October 2003, the INCYP facilitated 26 community changes (i.e., new or modified programs, policies, and practices). The youth mobilization effort facilitated a steady rate of increased community change over the documented period of the collaborative partnership. Table 1 provides illustrative examples of discrete instances of community changes facilitated by the INCYP. Of the facilitated changes, nearly 58% occurred in community and cultural organizations (e.g., a partnering community organization provided a summer enrichment program for at-risk youth). Nearly 27% of the community changes were facilitated in the faith community (e.g., a church developed after-school tutoring through a partnership with retired neighborhood teachers). Strategies most often used were enhancing services and supports (38%; for example, INCYP partnered with a church to provide a summer program for 60 youth) and those that removed barriers and enhanced access and opportunities (31%; for example, INC developed a youth intern position).

Figure 2 also displays an overlay of critical events that may have been influential in INCYP's facilitation of community change. Accelerated rates were predominantly associated with increased opportunities for youth engagement, facilitation and implementation of a youth-led action plan, and developing youth leaders to mobilize community change. The INCYP facilitated increased opportunities for youth engagement and leadership by: (1) inclusion of youth officers in the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council Youth Committee, (2) youth-led development of the Ivanhoe Youth Council, and (3) training of youth block contacts to help facilitate widespread adoption and implementation of the Ivanhoe Youth Council Strategic Plan.

INCYP Limitations and Challenges

Interpretation of this study has several limitations. First, a case study design cannot determine cause and effect in implementation of the framework and associated processes. The multiple case study design, however, contributed to understanding the community mobilization process. Second, documentation of the initiative's efforts was based on self-reported data. A systematic process was used, however, for data collection and examination of the processes that supported the community mobilization efforts. Third, the study period was too short to draw conclusions about the effect of the

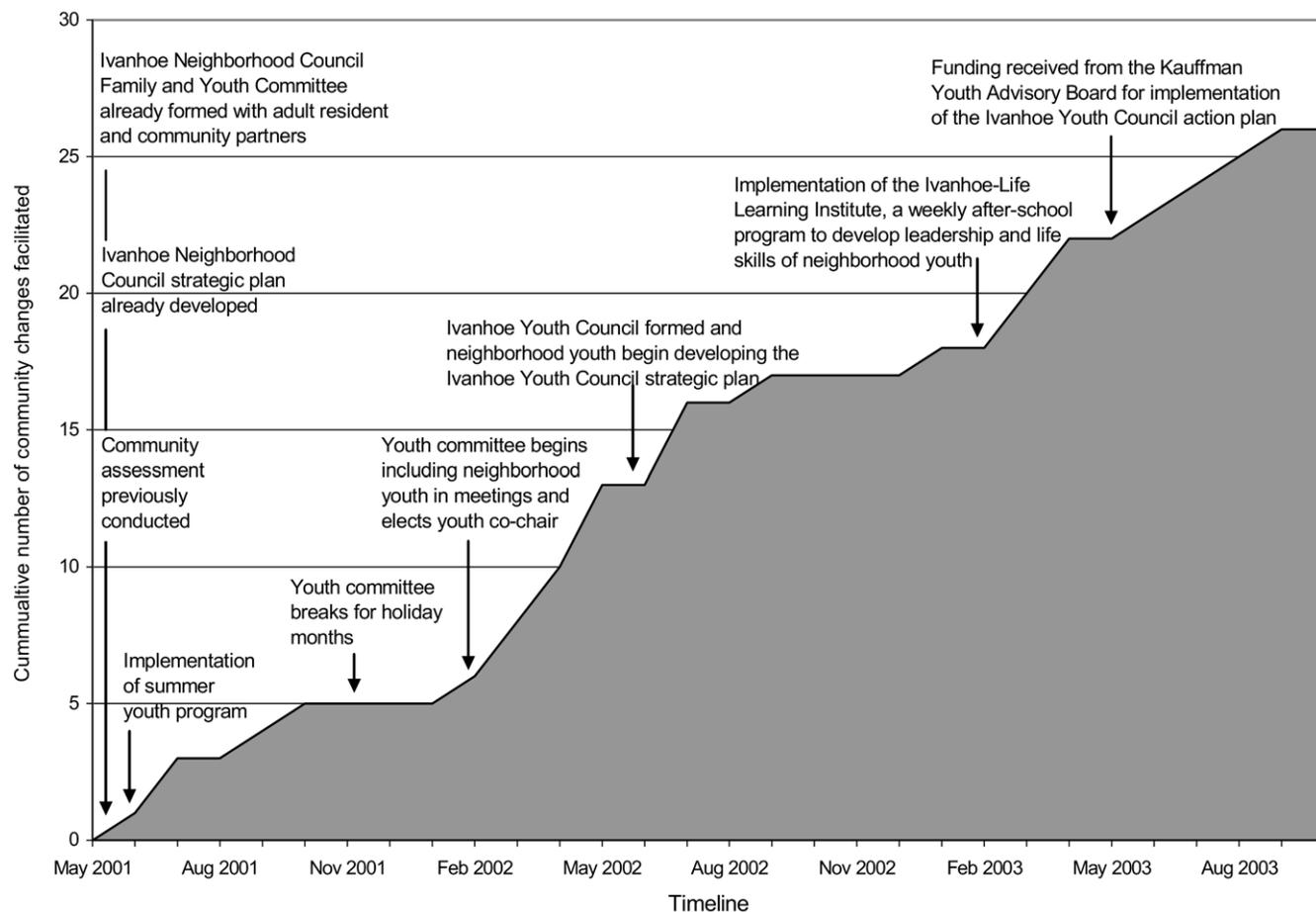


Figure 2. Cumulative number of community changes facilitated by the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council Youth Project.

documented community changes on widespread behavior change and improvement in population-level outcomes. Fourth, the external funding and support (i.e., financial resources to hire staff, technical assistance) for the mobilization effort may limit the generality of this study. Despite the considerable resource investment, the general strategy used for community mobilization did demonstrate the strength of grassroots-level organizing and action, particularly through the engagement of youth.

Emerging Lessons for Community Mobilization to Promote Healthy Youth Development

This empirical case study offers emerging lessons about the processes and conditions that support community mobilization efforts to promote healthy youth development. The following lessons and associated recommendations may help guide future research and practice.

Distributed opportunities for community-based leadership may enhance mobilization efforts. The development of diverse leadership (e.g., by age) appears to be critical for enhancing capacity to mobilize and support community change. The engagement of community-based leaders (e.g., block contacts, committee chairs),

particularly youth (those most affected by the problem), can substantially enhance a community mobilization effort aimed at improving youth-related outcomes.

The establishment of key partnerships with other organizations and institutions with similar youth-related goals and objectives can enhance leadership and organizational capacity. Collaboration with supporters to establish clear and complementary roles and responsibilities can enhance community mobilization.

The presence of a community mobilizer (or organizer) enhances facilitation of the mobilization process and provides a mechanism for implementing changes identified in community-determined strategic plans. Formal (paid) arrangements for a community mobilizer can take various forms (e.g., sharing mobilizer positions with other partner organizations). Informal (unpaid) arrangements can include providing training for community residents (e.g., block contacts, committee chairs) to serve as mobilizers. Supporting training and development to engage youth as mobilizers in youth development efforts is also important. Mobilizers are more likely to be effective when they have credibility within the organization and community, or commonalities with the target group.

Technical assistance can greatly enhance the capacity of a community mobilization effort, particularly when engaging youth with limited knowledge and experience. Coordination among multiple technical assistance providers is also important, as is ensuring that technical assistance enhances the capacity of the group, rather than creating dependence on the technical assistance provider.

Community mobilization efforts to promote healthy youth development should provide opportunities for youth to be agents of change and improvement in the community. It may be strategic to provide mobilization training and leadership opportunities for youth, especially between the ages of 10 and 15 years. Including youth in developing and implementing a strategic plan may be effective in engaging them in community mobilization efforts.

Conclusion

Emerging evidence from empirical case studies and experience suggests the importance of community mobilization in creating conditions that promote healthy youth development. When grounded in a framework for collaborative public health action,⁸ community mobilization can be seen as an iterative process that engages youth and adults in assessment, planning, and targeted action to change communities and promote healthy youth development. Key community processes, such as strategic planning, can facilitate implementation of a youth mobilization framework for community change. This process can enhance individual and collective efficacy and empowerment over local conditions.¹⁵ The engagement of youth—those most affected by youth violence—in all phases of the community mobilization process may serve as a protective factor.

This case study illustrates the use of a community mobilization framework to facilitate change and improvement related to healthy youth development, and suggests the importance of early and ongoing engagement of youth as change agents in the community mobilization effort.

Yet, to advance community mobilization efforts, particular attention should be paid to this fundamental question: Whether, and under what conditions, do community changes (the intermediate outcome) actually yield improvements in population-level outcomes? Community mobilization efforts occur in a complex system, where multiple interventions address interrelated factors to affect multiple and interrelated outcomes. Under such conditions, where attribution of cause and effect can be difficult or impossible, analysis may shift from “attribution” to “analysis of contribution.”^{18,19} In this study, changes in leadership and program investments by the funder ended the initiative before improvements in population-level indicators related to youth development were evident. Further

studies of community mobilization efforts to improve youth development in different contexts can help to understand what “dose” of environmental change (community changes) is sufficient to produce the “response” of improvement in population-level outcomes.

Healthy youth development, including avoidance of violence, is a challenge for many communities, particularly those in urban neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. Because multiple and interrelated risk factors contribute to the problem of youth violence, community mobilization efforts may help to create conditions for healthier youth development. Despite significant challenges, our dawning knowledge about community processes permits unprecedented opportunities to understand and improve community mobilization for healthy youth development. Taking action together, community members, including youth, can create the conditions for a safe and brighter tomorrow for all our youth.

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