

It's About Time



# Putting the Engage Back into Engagement



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The following are some of the soundbites from the above presentation. For copies of specific slides or for additional information, please email [m3consultingllcwi@gmail.com](mailto:m3consultingllcwi@gmail.com) or call 715-216-0721.

## These are decades long issues, or wicked problems, where there is no easy button

- Substance misuse is a complex issue where no one program or experience can predict or influence the outcomes in a community. Available resources frequently (and unfortunately) are not put into building a community supportive of prevention versus investing in intervention and enforcement. We did not get into this situation overnight, and it is going to take time to right the ship.
- **Resource** – [https://www.wickedproblems.com/1\\_wicked\\_problems.php](https://www.wickedproblems.com/1_wicked_problems.php)

## The pandemic has taught us vulnerability, adaptability, & there's no such thing as 'normal'

- Over these past two years coalitions have had to learn how to engage their communities differently out of necessity thanks to new technology, new tools, & new ways to connect with each other. We saw adaptive efforts succeed (ex. adding more virtual engagement options) with the help of continual efforts (ex. maintaining newsletters or surveys). While others experienced an exodus of partners when they were holding out for the old or comfortable ways of doing things (ex. postponing all efforts indefinitely until they could be 'in person').
- **Resource** – [www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/2022\\_engage\\_april\\_story2\\_finalv2.pdf](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/2022_engage_april_story2_finalv2.pdf)

## Relationships are an important function of sustainability

- Not all that we do can be measured in tangible outputs and outcomes. Mission, vision, values, governance, membership, goals, funding, visibility, public support, and the overall feels of the organization all need to be planned for and maintained when coalitions look at their sustainability goals. Be intentional, always.
- **Example** – Sustainability Plan Worksheet

### **There are many layers to engagement, how do you maximize what you have**

- Lifers, just in timers, and loafers – sometimes we have to let it go that not everyone will be available when we need them to be. When people see full time staff sometimes it implies you have to do all the work – avoid the “here’s our plan, come join us or what are you going to do”
- **Resource** - <https://www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/MAPC-Community-Engagement-Guide-2016.pdf> and <https://mypowerpeople.com/coalition-building>.

### **Moving ideas to action, define your role in the community**

- Coalitions are really good at the first three strategies for change, but we lack in the environmental strategies which have a larger impact on communities. We are also equipped to use the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) to guide our activities.
- **Resource** - <https://www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/files/spfandenvironmentalstrategies.pdf>

### **Relationships matter, first impressions are a must (or can be a bust)**

- Hand shake before a hand out. Are you the right person to deliver the message? Do your homework based on what your goals are for this relationship. Get to know them before you approach them. Don’t be afraid to change your examples, but keep your key messages the same.
- **Resource** – [www.tamarackcommunity.ca/latest/we-need-fewer-volunteers-and-more-community](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/latest/we-need-fewer-volunteers-and-more-community)
- **Suggestions** - For example, when you present to a youth serving organization focus on the importance of prevention, or when talking to county board members the return on investments.

### **Coalitions are not meant to be a lifetime commitment, meet people where they are at**

- To a vision yes, to completing your mission...not so easy! Find short term projects, use specific asks, utilize what is already happening. Define what need from them, and what can you offer.
- **Example** – Initiative Involvement Agreement Handout – Individual & Organizational

### **Get a spot at the table, but recognize you are not the center of the universe**

- It’s tough to hear! When we move from a coalition centric model to an issue/community centric model we can better address the problems, and keep partners moving in the same direction.
- **Suggestion** - Staff or coalition leadership should try to live in the hub of the wheel. This will help connect partners to each other, and support parallel activities to keep the coalition moving forward.

### **We don’t know everyone we need to know, but we all know someone who knows someone**

- There is no greater tool to get to know new or reengage existing members than to make yourself available to them for a conversation (or coffee!). Soft asks or handoffs from partners can also help to break the ice on new relationships.
- **Resource** - <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/creating-and-maintaining-coalitions-and-partnerships>
- **Examples** – Measure how well you are engaging current members (**partner survey handout**) and how to gather interests from new members (**partner inventories handout**)

### **Avoid the coalition sector trap, no one fits neatly in a box**

- Parents are professionals, amazing right!?! People are missing - such as funders or policy makers - whose relationships support the work we do, and they have a direct line to sustainability. Additionally, broad categories such as “government” may have you missing non-traditional partners.
- **Suggestions** – Medical examiners, solid waste professional, marketing firms, local defense attorneys, repair shops, pharmacists, and online newspapers are all examples of partners that have a lot to offer.

### **Share the load with those that have similar goals**

- Who is working on this issue, is already providing this service, or has a parallel mission? You don't have to do this alone, even if you are grant funded to do so.
- **Suggestion** – Partner with your local higher learning (technical or universities) and/or other community coalitions. You can put together a great training, work with the school to help with the back end and facilities, and promote to more people with similar interests. It's a win win!

### **Change happens at the speed of trust, what does your coalition need now**

- Ask your coalition members what they need. Is it networking? Is it help in coordinating efforts? As groups move along the continuum leadership needs to pay attention to activities that will build trust amongst the partners who are currently at the table, or thinking of joining.
- **Resource** - [www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Collaboration Spectrum Tool July 2017.pdf](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Collaboration%20Spectrum%20Tool%20July%202017.pdf)

### **Silos are not bad, as long as relationships, communications and trust are built**

- When partners stay in their lane, but openly communicate with partners there is less likelihood of territories or hurt feelings. Change happens at speed of trust, so transparency is a must!
- **Example** – The Activator e-newsletter – Share resources, tools, trainings and so on, These can then be posted on social media like [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/) or [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/).

### **Change implies movement, coalitions (sometimes) imply stagnation**

- Coming together to talk about issues is one thing, moving them to action is a skill that many coalitions are missing or could strengthen. By having specific, tangible asks you will be better equipped to take steps towards your goals.
- **Example** – Action Team Description Handout

### **Show gratitude and appreciation, coalitions are powered by people**

- These are complex problems, and you can't do it alone – celebrations, recognitions, simple thank you notes, etc. can go a long way!
- **Suggestions** – Wordles, spotlights in newsletters, media recognition, annual membership events

### **Don't be paralyzed by inaction, look to 'clean the whole pond'**

- Move outside of the traditional inner ring of socio-economic levels impacting individuals and families to more community-based and policy efforts. Baby steps, celebrating small victories, and keep moving through the SPF remembering that it is a circle on purpose. If it is not working, pivot!
- **Resource** - <https://www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/environmentalstrategies.pdf>

### **People need to know who you are, what you stand for**

- Importance of branding – including use of colors, fonts, logos, etc – is a critical part of sustaining and engaging your partners. This could be the perfect place to engage your “business” sector in the project for in kind contributions. Messages on issues are important, brand everything, use all your connections, and don't be afraid to go to other people's tables.
- **Suggestions** – Free online software can make your life way easier! Visit [pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com/), [freepik.com](https://www.freepik.com/) or [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com/) for free photos. Sign up for a free professional account at [canva.com](https://www.canva.com/). And create your brand's color palette at [color.adobe.com](https://color.adobe.com/) and featured font at [www.typewolf.com/free-fonts](https://www.typewolf.com/free-fonts).

### Sponsored events, trainings or other activities need to fit your mission (and goals!)

- Is it best practice? How much are you putting in vs what you're getting out? What's the purpose (recruitment, awareness building, etc.) Are you measuring it? Does it support your brand? What's your niche? Our partners are stretched thin, our volunteers are tired, and attention is pulled in all directions. Make sure that the timing, location, and goals fit within your mission.
- **Resource** - <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tthy-2020-event-guide.pdf>
- **Example** – Questions to Ask Yourself handout

### Slow your roll, & know your role

- We don't have to do everything by ourselves as coalition leaders or staff. Many times, where there is grant funding to support initiatives the community becomes comfortable in letting you take the lead. What happens when that funding ends? As staff we have a responsibility to the community to mentor our members in what works, what doesn't.
- **Resources** - Prevention Tools: What works, what doesn't [www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/22-1662.pdf](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/22-1662.pdf), County Health Rankings [www.countyhealthrankings.org/take-action-to-improve-health/what-works-for-health](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/take-action-to-improve-health/what-works-for-health), the WI State Council on Alcohol & Other Drug Abuse (SCAODA) Reports found at [www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/scaoda/adhoccommitteereports.htm](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/scaoda/adhoccommitteereports.htm) and The Community Guide found at [www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org).

### Don't forget about your needs, be your own biggest fan

- Be ok with controversy – working in prevention there will always be someone who doesn't agree. And recognize that not everyone will like what you do
- **Suggestions** - Set boundaries and practice self-care. When you read the comments, do so with an open mind to help shape your counter points – sometimes what's not said is how to change their opinions (ex. fear or misinformation).

To sum up...as we emerge from the pandemic, we need to take what was learned, both the good and the bad, and apply it moving forward to what's going to further your coalition's mission. It's critical for coalitions and their leadership to define who they are and what their role is in the community. Once you know this, it's time to take yourself and your coalition's mission to other people's tables, they don't always have to come to yours. In doing so, you are better able to keep the issues you are trying to address in the middle, but a more coordinated effort is needed to keep everyone on the same page. For sustainable change that engages a diverse set of partners, we must look at how do we clean the entire pond, not just focus on the ducks. The connections that you make over time are one of your most valuable assets, and are critical to your coalition's sustainability. Continue to check in with your existing membership, as well as intentionally engage new partners with specific asks. Lastly, take care of yourself because there is only one of you!



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