

# INNOVATIONS IN COMMUNITY-LEVEL PREVENTION

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# INNOVATIONS IN COMMUNITY-LEVEL PREVENTION

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mobilizing Communities to Prevent Sexual Violence</b>	<b>2</b>
<i>Renewal of Community-Level Work</i>	
<i>Purpose of This Report</i>	
<b>Moving Beyond the Individual</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Blackburn Center</i>	
<i>Multicultural Efforts to End Sexual Assault (MESA)</i>	
<i>New Mexico Alcohol Density Task Force</i>	
<i>Vermont Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force</i>	
<i>Summary</i>	
<b>Social-Ecological Framework of Sexual Violence</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Social-Ecological Supports for Sexual Violence</i>	
<i>Using the Social-Ecological Model</i>	
<i>Summary</i>	

<b>Approaches to Community-Level Change</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Community Development</i>	
<i>Consciousness Raising</i>	
<i>Policy</i>	
<i>Summary</i>	
<b>Common Characteristics</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Community Empowerment</i>	
<i>Multiple Areas of Action</i>	
<i>Local Design</i>	
<i>External Linkages and Resources</i>	
<i>Theory of Change</i>	
<i>Sense of Community</i>	
<i>Long-Term Perspective</i>	
<i>Summary</i>	
<b>Recommendations for Practice</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Local Programs</i>	
<i>Technical Assistance Providers</i>	
<i>Funders and Public Health Agencies</i>	
<b>References</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Methodological Notes</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>27</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on community-level strategies to prevent sexual violence. These efforts are, in some ways, a return to the grassroots activism that was a hallmark of the rape crisis movement of the 1970s. Practitioners have responded to the call for community-level work in a variety of ways.

Widespread use of the social-ecological model (SEM) as a framework has increased understanding of how to prevent violence. The SEM illustrates the combination of multiple influences on how individuals relate to those around them and to their broader environment. While the SEM has helped to define what sexual violence prevention initiatives intend to change, it does not explain how to bring about those changes. The community-level initiatives described in this report illustrate three approaches to facilitating change: community development, consciousness raising, and policy.

These approaches share common characteristics that are necessary for successful community change:

- Community empowerment
- Multiple areas of action
- Local design
- External linkages and resources
- Plausible theory of change
- Strengthening the sense of community
- Taking a long-term perspective

Funders, public health agencies, technical assistance providers, and local programs each have roles to play in promoting and engaging in community-level prevention.

It is recommended that **funders and public health agencies:**

- Align requests for proposals and monitoring reports with community-level interventions
- Fund multi-year proposals
- Distinguish between the “what” and the “how” of community-level work
- Invest in supporting programs to clarify their theories of change

**Technical assistance providers** are encouraged to:

- Provide locally-specific technical assistance
- Help programs think beyond what they do to develop a clearer explanation of how they do it

**Local programs** are advised to:

- Clarify how they think the community will change as a result of interventions
- Be specific and realistic in their plans
- Invest in bringing their entire organization on board with social change goals

The programs highlighted in this report demonstrate that while community change is complex, it is also possible and promising. Sufficient investment and a long-term commitment to this work are necessary for it to succeed.

# MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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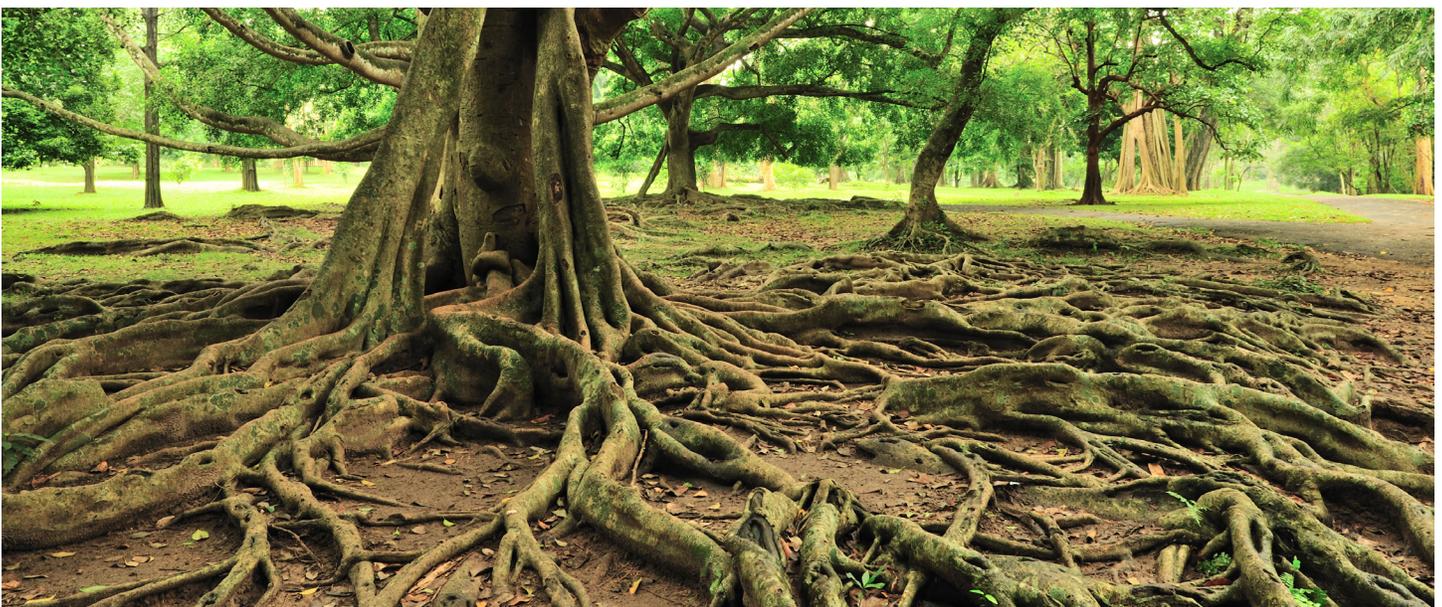
## Community Change in the Movement to End Sexual Violence

The rape crisis movement of the 1970s was led by small, unaffiliated groups of women who provided crisis intervention services and public education based on feminist analyses of social change and empowerment (Gornick, Burt, & Pittman, 1985). Those early organizations were often highly critical of the systems survivors had to interact with, such as the criminal justice and medical systems (Campbell & Martin, 2001; Matthews, 1995). Prevention activities in the early years of the rape crisis movement included monitoring the criminal justice system, calling for political responses to rape, and public education aimed at raising the public's consciousness about rape (Gornick et al., 1985; Schmitt & Martin, 1999).

With the eventual influx of governmental funding for rape crisis services, numerous changes happened including less emphasis on political action, and more emphasis on direct services

(Campbell, Baker, & Mazurek, 1998; Campbell & Martin, 2001; Matthews, 1995). With the increase in funding of the Rape Prevention and Education program through the Violence Against Women Act, there was unprecedented governmental support for prevention (Campbell & Martin, 2001). By 2002, 30 states were also allocating state funds for sexual assault prevention.

The ongoing emphasis on prevention has made more resources available for addressing the root causes of sexual violence, including broad cultural factors such as beliefs about gender equality and multiple forms of oppression, social systems that reinforce power over others, and informal and formal social relationships that connect individuals to the broader culture (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2010). This focus on root causes is critical to primary prevention. As one Executive Director who was interviewed for this report explained: *“Social change is at the root of the prevention of sexual violence because sexual violence is embedded in culture and social norms.”*





When thinking about how prevention programs can mobilize their communities and implement community-level prevention strategies, it is important to remember that this approach is not new to the movement to end sexual violence. Community-level strategies explore the settings such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods in which social relationships occur. Community-level strategies identify and act to impact the characteristics of such settings in ways that are associated with perpetration of sexual violence. In many ways, this is a return to the roots of the movement as being about social change. What is new is the availability of funding for the work and, when using restricted funds, the need to align the work with funding requirements. There are also new possibilities for using theoretical frameworks and research findings to inform community-level strategies.

## **Purpose of This Report**

State sexual assault coalitions, administrators of Rape Prevention and Education funds, and local prevention programs have responded to the call for community-level work in a variety of ways. This report focuses on how programs at the local and state levels have worked to engage with communities through community mobilization and public policy. It highlights examples from the field that represent promising directions in this area.

This project was not a systematic testing of community mobilization strategies. Rather, it uses examples from the field to document and better understand the possibilities, challenges, and rewards of community-level prevention. Coalitions, administrators, local programs, and technical assistance providers can learn from these programs about the approaches they are taking, how those approaches developed, and promising next steps.

## MOVING BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL

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Many prevention activities focus on changing individual's knowledge and attitudes and developing new skills that redefine relationships: for example, promoting healthy intimate relationships and empowering bystanders to intervene in situations that are either high risk for sexual violence or reinforce rape culture. However, focusing on individual behavior alone will not prevent sexual violence. Efforts must take a comprehensive approach and must also focus on the environmental and social factors that influence individual behaviors. The use of a social-ecological framework recognizes the dynamic interrelations among various personal and environmental/community factors. The social-ecological model includes four interconnected levels at which change can occur: individual, relationship, community and societal. This model informs comprehensive sexual violence prevention efforts, including those at the community level.

This report focuses on prevention work that is being implemented at the community level of the social ecology. For this report, program representatives were interviewed about their prevention work at the community level. These programs were selected because of the notable successes they are having and the fact they have each taken a different approach. Collectively, they illustrate that there are many ways to engage in this work and that success rests in part on choosing an approach that fits the needs, values, and context of the community. A brief summary of each of these community-level initiatives is provided below.

### **Blackburn Center**

The Blackburn Center in Greensburg, Pennsylvania defines social change as the goal



of its prevention work. Staff carry out this work through five major approaches:

1. Their work on college campuses addresses culture on campus through policy interventions; training faculty, administrators, and trustees; educating students on sexual assault and harassment; and promoting gender equity.
2. Their work in middle schools and high schools emphasizes primary prevention through building skills for gender equity and bystander empowerment.
3. They use social media to promote dialogue about gender equity and privilege.



4. Broader community work includes a Men as Allies initiative to engage men in their everyday lives and change how they engage with other men, a Future Advocates initiative to engage young adults, and an annual Mile in Her Shoes event that incorporates social activism.
5. Internally, Blackburn Center works to develop its own policies and procedures that promote gender equity in their own organization and in their partnerships with others.

### **Multicultural Efforts to End Sexual Assault (MESA)**

MESA, housed in the College of Agriculture at Purdue University, uses community organizing strategies to engage with farm laborer and immigrant communities, LGBTQ communities, and underserved students on college campuses. Because of the nature of community organizing, the work looks different in each community. Across communities, however, there are common roots of building trust between the organizer and

community members and within the community itself, being conscious of differential power, and addressing how sexual violence prevention intersects with other issues the community faces.

MESA's community organizers begin by spending time in the community and building relationships. From there, meetings, gatherings and connecting with formal and informal leaders usually takes place. Through those interactions, the community organizers work to help the community take ownership of what they want to do to address sexual violence. The organizer then supports and nurtures the community's own action plans.

### **New Mexico Alcohol Outlet Density Workgroup**

Recognizing that the incidence of sexual violence is higher in areas with high density of alcohol sales, the New Mexico Department of Health has been working to educate local sexual violence prevention contractors about the relationship between geographic density of

alcohol sales and sexual violence perpetration. An Alcohol Outlet Density Workgroup that includes public health departments, rape crisis centers, and local government from Santa Fe, Gallup, Taos, and Española is working to build interagency partnerships.

The strategies are tailored to each community's needs and context. Common across the communities is a two-pronged approach. The first goal is to educate city councils on alcohol density and its consequences. To achieve this, the task force published a state-specific fact sheet on alcohol density and alcohol-related harm, including sexual assault. To help less populated areas, the task force is currently investigating the literature on alcohol density and related harm in small metropolitan and rural areas.

The second goal is to bring in local data about alcohol licenses and consumption and the incidence of sexual violence to limit the number of alcohol licenses that are issued for a given geographic area. How those limits are instituted varies. For example, in 2012 Santa Fe adopted a zoning ordinance that limits where licenses can be. In addition to the state's limitation on alcohol licenses within 300 feet of a school or house of worship, Santa Fe added a local ordinance that prohibits alcohol licenses within 500 feet of playgrounds. In other communities, the strategy has been to oppose new licenses one at a time.

## **Vermont Network Against Sexual and Domestic Violence**

Since 2006, the Vermont Network Against Sexual and Domestic Violence has engaged in four statewide initiatives that led to the inclusion of sexual violence prevention in health education provided by Vermont K-12 schools. The initiatives include:

1. State legislation created by the Sexual

Violence Prevention Task Force to provide guidelines for schools' capacity-building for sexual violence prevention education

2. Task force completed an inventory of prevention programs in the state and made recommendations to the legislature
3. Task force published a technical assistance guide for schools
4. Legislature mandated that sexual violence be included in health education provided by Vermont K-12 schools

These initiatives have led to change in multiple settings. The task force was the first time that sexual violence prevention educators, including both rape crisis and child sexual abuse prevention programs, came together and agreed upon best practices. For schools, the unfunded mandate to do sexual violence prevention was eased by the [Technical Assistance Resource Guide](#) developed by the task force (Vermont Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force, 2010). Finally, because the Network led the task force, the role of rape crisis programs was maintained as one of the expert guides for the schools.

## **Summary**

As these examples show, community-level prevention can take many forms. Yet, there are common characteristics that tie together these initiatives. They all reflect a social-ecological understanding of the causes of sexual violence. They also share common characteristics in how they engage with the community. These will be discussed in the remainder of the report.

# SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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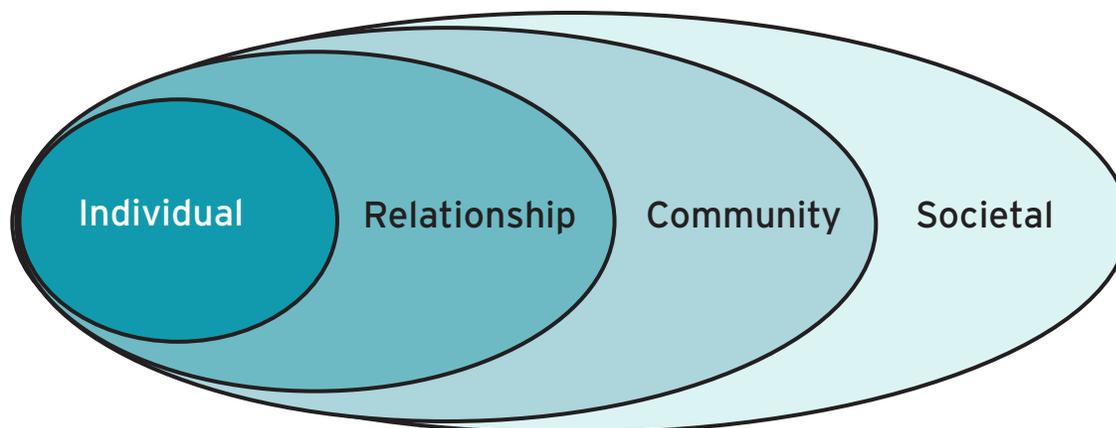
## Social-Ecological Supports for Sexual Violence

One of the tools that has contributed to renewing the use of community-level strategies is the widespread use of a social-ecological framework for prevention of sexual violence. The social-ecological framework is not a recent theoretical advance. It was proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, a developmental psychologist, in 1977. It was used later by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in addressing violence after the World Report on Violence and Health was published (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002).

The social-ecological model consists of nested levels that influence human behavior. At the center is the individual. These are factors of personal history and biology that increase the risk of perpetration. At the second level, individuals behave in the context of their relationships with others who shape their beliefs

and behaviors. This second level also includes factors such as place, time, activities, and social roles (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In turn, at the third level, those relationships and other factors are shaped by the communities in which they interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). "Community" can be defined in many ways, including schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, social groups, and other formal and informal social structures that influence what people do. This includes social structures in the community including workplace norms, mass media, government, and informal social networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Finally, the societal level consists of overarching patterns of cultures and institutions such as gender inequality, discrimination, and cultural or religious beliefs. The societal factors bring meaning and motivation to the other levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The social-ecological model can be used to examine the causes of sexual violence. The individual level factors causing sexual violence



## SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *The social-ecological model: A framework for prevention*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html>



are among the most commonly studied. For example, social learning theory says that children learn to use violence to get their way when they see adults acting violently (Heise, 1998; Jasinski, 2001). Social learning theory may also be used to explain the role that high levels of prior sex and sexual promiscuity have in the cause of sexual violence. It is thought that early and frequent dating and sex reinforce a false sense of entitlement to sex (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001). Additionally, biological factors are understood to increase the tendency toward general violence and using violence to remove painful feelings (O'Neill & Harway, 1997).

Individual level factors alone are not enough to explain all the causes of sexual violence. They are unable to explain why not everyone who comes from an aggressive family or who was abused in childhood or youth grows up to be violent. They also do not explain why violence is expressed in the form of sexual violence against women (Jasinski, 2001). In order to account for these differences, other factors must be considered.

In research on sexual violence, relationship level factors have been studied by looking at the settings in which assaults occur (Heise, 1998; Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991). Of

particular interest to researchers has been the role of alcohol (Jasinski, 2001). The relationship between alcohol use and sexual violence may be the result of a number of factors including:

- The inhibiting effects of alcohol
- Misperceptions of sexual intent
- Alcohol as justification for inappropriate behavior
- Stereotypes about women who drink (Jasinski, 2001)

The following relationship level factors can contribute to a false sense of male entitlement and the use of force or coercion:

- An intimate relationship between the survivor and the person who perpetrated
- Isolated setting
- Misconception of the woman's cues (Abbey et al., 2001)

Finally, a pattern of impersonal sex may lead to sexual violence when it is combined with a hostile masculine identity (Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995). Additional relationship-level factors that have been studied include:

- Delinquent peer associations

- The acceptability of verbal pressure
- Male peer support
- Hostility to women
- Hostile masculinity (Jasinski, 2001)

These factors relate to the male peer-support model that emphasizes the ways socialization teaches men it is acceptable to dominate and control women (Jasinski, 2001). Additionally, rape myths may work together with other factors such as willingness to commit sexual assault if there was no guarantee of punishment (Abbey, McAuslan, & Ross, 1998).

Factors studied at the community level include:

- Poverty
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of institutional support for police and judicial systems
- General tolerance of sexual violence within the community
- Weak community sanctions against sexual violence perpetrators

Finally, limited research has been done on societal-level factors impacting sexual violence. One early study analyzed state-level data from all 50 states on the relationship between sex magazine circulation and the incidence of sexual violence in a community. Those findings supported the idea that pornography reinforces rape supportive attitudes and that it increases male tendencies to rape or behave aggressively toward women (Baron & Straus, 1989; Ellis, 1989). This type of analysis is a rare example of the attempt to test empirically the feminist theory that male dominance is reinforced by prostitution and pornography (Jasinski, 2001). Urbanization is also associated with higher

rates of sexual violence and has been explained as providing more opportunities for criminal behavior (Baron & Straus, 1989). Finally, unemployment and economic equality have been related to higher rates of sexual violence with rape being explained as a way to assert masculinity in the absence of viable economic success (Baron & Straus, 1989).

Other studies on societal level factors focus on masculinity and rigid gender roles. For example, in cultures that link masculinity and male dominance, it is theorized that there is a socially-created need for danger and excitement, which reduces empathy for others. Since

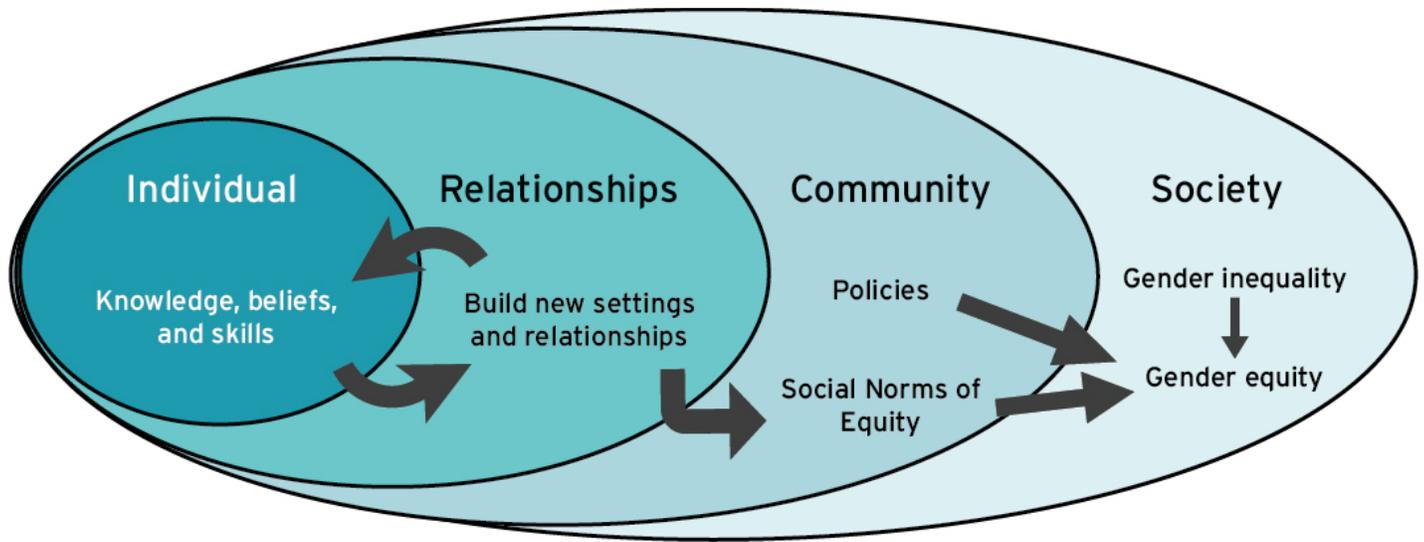
sexual assault is associated with dominant masculinity, it is seen as validating the masculinity of the person who perpetrated (Heise, 1998). When rigid gender roles that reinforce male success and power are challenged, men will respond to defend their masculine self-esteem by targeting the perceived source of conflict: women (O'Neill & Harway, 1997).

There is data that have demonstrated a relationship between gender inequality and the breakdown of rules, roles and institutions that regulate social behavior (Baron & Straus, 1989). This breakdown of social rules and roles is linked to the rate of sexual violence (Baron & Straus, 1989). Finally, there may be a relationship between socially condoned violence and sexual violence (Baron, Straus, & Jaffee, 1988). Socially condoned violence includes:

- Popularity of aggression in the mass media
- Governmental use of violence
- Participation in socially approved violent or aggressive activities (Baron et al., 1988)

The more society endorses the use of physical force "legitimate ends," the greater the chance that the acceptance of the use of force will spill

**Rape myths: "attitudes and generally false beliefs about rape that are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Lonsway, 1996, p. 133)**



**Figure 1.** Levels of change in Blackburn Center’s prevention work

over for “illegitimate ends” (Baron et al., 1988).

In summary, the social-ecological model conceptualizes behavior as occurring in a context that includes individual experiences and characteristics, the immediate setting, formal and informal social structures, and institutional and cultural patterns. The heavy reliance on this model in sexual violence prevention means it influences the strategies that are used in the field.

### Using the Social-Ecological Model

The community-level work done by the programs highlighted in this report provides examples of how prevention efforts are being implemented at multiple levels of the social ecology and, most importantly, how programs are working beyond the individual level. To illustrate how this works, two of the programs will be explained here using the social-ecological model.

#### *Blackburn Center*

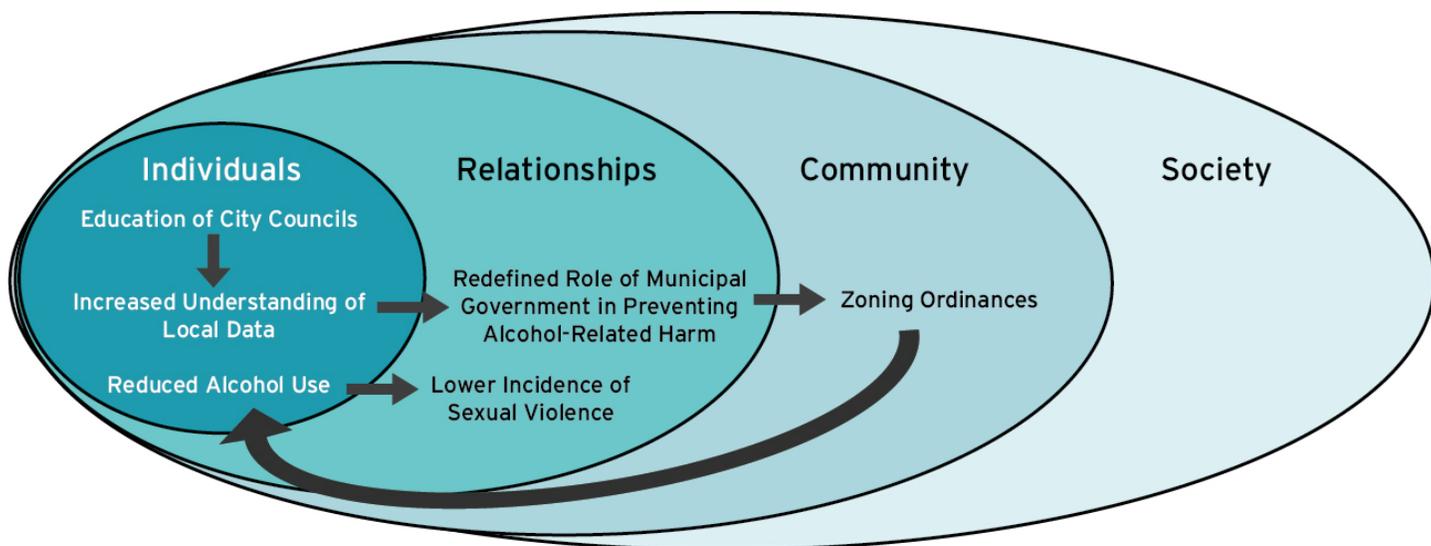
As illustrated in Figure 1, Blackburn Center is working to change societal-level values about gender by transforming gender inequality into

gender equity. This approach is grounded in an understanding of gender-based violence that includes any individual who has power over another person being given permission to victimize someone who is less powerful. Their work is guided by the belief that equity in relationships is essential and that it cannot occur without society committing to gender equity.

This understanding has brought their work to focus on two main strategies. First, they develop and implement policies within community settings that promote gender equality such as workplace employment policies around equal pay, family leave, and promotion practices. Those policies will help to shift the societal-level values from reinforcing gender inequality to gender equality. Second, they build new settings (for example Men as Allies, Future Advocates, and social media networks) where gender equity is practiced.

#### *New Mexico’s Alcohol Density Task Force*

Application of the social-ecological model can also be seen in policy-based initiatives such as New Mexico’s work to reduce alcohol density in



**Figure 2.** Levels of change in alcohol density work

communities. The task force’s goal of enacting local policies to reduce the density of alcohol sales in neighborhoods clearly places this work at the community level. However, the way the task force operates and what is needed to bring those policies about requires activities and change at multiple levels of the social ecology.

As illustrated in Figure 2, while the zoning ordinances occur at the community level, the process of change begins and ends at the individual level. Beginning with educating city councils using local data, the process redefines the relationship of the municipal government to the issue by creating a collective, governmental responsibility for preventing alcohol-related harm. It is only with that knowledge and role definition that zoning ordinances can be introduced and enacted. With the resulting decrease in alcohol licenses, the rate of alcohol use is reduced and, in turn, a lower incidence of sexual violence occurs.

### Summary

Similar illustrations could be created for the community-level strategies of MESA and the

Vermont Network Against Sexual and Domestic Violence. As the illustrations in Figures 1 and 2 show, community-level work is connected to change at other levels of the social ecology. However, caution must be exerted when drawing out those connections. It is easy to say “everything is connected.” Those connections, though, must be explicit, logical, and plausible. Without clear connections, the tendency is for programs to continue working primarily at the individual level and assume that a chain reaction to the levels of relationships, community, and society will follow by default.

## APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY-LEVEL CHANGE

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The social-ecological model is a useful tool for thinking about **what** changes when doing community-level primary prevention. However, it does not explain **how** to bring about those changes. There are multiple approaches to community change. No single approach is the best one to take. Three approaches can be seen in the work done by the programs highlighted in this report.

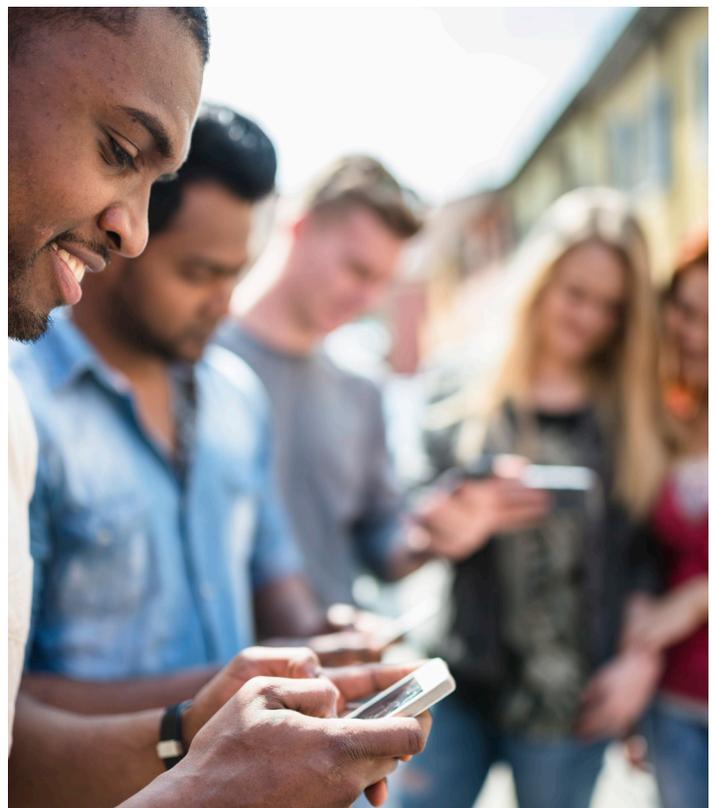
### Community Development

Community development strategies work by gradually strengthening relationships among community members and, through that process, defining community problems, resources, and solutions in a way that brings new perspectives and strategies into the community (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2001). Rather than strategies being imposed by a central authority, community development builds consensus within the community and builds citizen participation in finding and implementing solutions to their community problems (Dalton et al., 2001).

The community-level work being done by the Blackburn Center provides multiple examples of community development in action. It is seen most clearly in their Men as Allies, Future Advocates, and social networking on Facebook and Twitter. These activities create new settings in the community that did not previously exist and, therefore, reflect community-level change. Within those settings, changes in relationships also occur as participants are encouraged, challenged, and supported to extend the values and processes of those settings into their other relationships and into other settings such as their workplaces, faith communities, and peer groups. As Blackburn's Executive Director explained, they are working to "saturate the community in

intentional and impactful ways" by empowering members of these groups to be agents of change in their workplaces, community organizations, neighborhoods, and personal relationships.

The Blackburn Center staff have substantial influence on how the problems and solutions of gender inequity are defined in these groups. However, it is a more open process than if they were directing specific solutions. For example, through social media they have created new settings within their community for dialogue about issues related to sexual violence and gender equity. The center shapes what occurs in that online setting by the articles they post. However, through the online exchange, different ideas for what can be done locally may be proposed. Then individuals choose if, where, and how they will take action.



## Consciousness Raising

Consciousness raising strategies work by increasing community members' critical awareness of the social conditions that affect them (Dalton et al., 2001). That understanding is then used to plan and carry out actions to change those conditions. Similar to community development approaches, consciousness raising empowers community members to define community problems and solutions for themselves. One difference from community development approaches is that consciousness raising tends to focus on those who are most underrepresented, underserved, and disadvantaged by the existing social systems. Additionally, it focuses on collective action that transforms the community, rather than only on individuals taking action in their own lives.

MESA is a prime example of consciousness raising approaches to community-level prevention. Their work includes organizing with families, schools, and community groups. It is carried out through meetings, education, networking, one-on-one support, donation drives, storytelling, art projects, and public events such as community theatre. All of these activities include critical conversations about what problems the community is facing, how community members understand the causes and consequences of those problems, and what they think the solutions are. As the community builds shared understandings, they design and implement actions to address those problems. Consciousness-raising is different from mere awareness education because of the actions that come out of the process. In MESA's work, actions have included work to pass local ordinances, formation of community coalitions, goods drives to provide material support to victims and their families, hosting of social events to break isolation, and curriculum development.

Consciousness raising requires a profound level of openness and flexibility on the part of the community organizers. As one of the MESA's community organizers explained, "As an organizer, the point is to get things moving. It doesn't go in a linear direction. People feel empowered and have agency and the capacity to do things...I am invested in the solutions, but I can't take it personally when the community chooses a solution that is different than what I am interested in doing. Organizers are not the saviors of the community." Another one of MESA's community organizers noted, "Usually the community's solution is not what I think the solution will be."

## Policy

Policy initiatives are clearly illustrated in the work being done by the Alcohol Outlet Density Workgroup in New Mexico and the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force in Vermont. This approach involves informing institutional decisions, policies, or laws (Dalton et al., 2001). While it may focus on governmental institutions, it does not need to. Informing policies and practices in the private sector, educational institutions, news media, etc., can also be the focus. Rather than attempting to influence institutional practices through social action such as boycotts or demonstrations, this approach seeks to reach those who hold power with information and reasoned arguments (Dalton et al., 2001). However, successful change requires more than simply providing relevant information. Success requires forming relationships and critical alliances, engaging in ongoing dialogue, proposing practical solutions that are actionable, and building bridges between those who hold power and the people who are affected by their decisions.

The importance of building relationships with a specific purpose in mind has been critical to the success of both the New Mexico and Vermont policy initiatives. In New Mexico, relationship



building has included forging effective alliances between rape prevention programs and public health workers. At first, the rape crisis staff were hesitant to talk about alcohol because of concerns about how alcohol consumption is often used as grounds for blaming sexual assault survivors for being victimized. Therefore, addressing alcohol density as a strategy was initially met with skepticism. However, as the discussion made clear that there is a link between alcohol density and the incidence of sexual violence (National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], 2015), it was possible for the two stakeholder groups to work together on a common cause.

In Vermont, the crucial relationships were with the legislators and school personnel. At the state level, the Network Against Sexual and Domestic violence “made ourselves indispensable to legislators.” This way, as the Network identified unintended consequences that would likely occur as a result of proposed legislation, they could work with legislators to mitigate those consequences. Success relied on strategies such as preparing survivors to testify before legislative committees and strategic education of key legislators. At the local level,

the mandate that schools include sexual violence prevention in their health curriculum could have potentially replaced the role of rape prevention programs. Therefore, the Network led the formation of the task force in a way that rape prevention programs had a lead role in guiding and supporting school curricula. For some prevention programs, the legislatively mandated involvement of schools in prevention education has become an avenue for prevention staff to be freed up from curriculum implementation so they can do more comprehensive, multi-level work in schools.

## Summary

Community-level change can be accomplished through different approaches. There is no single blueprint for how to engage in this type of prevention work. The different approaches may work directly with community members or with institutional authorities such as legislators and executives. All of the approaches, however, take sources of social power — including citizen participation, definitions of social problems, and articulation of solutions — and use them to bring about change that benefits the entire community.

## COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

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The approaches to community-level change described in the previous section use very different strategies to prevent sexual violence. However, there are common characteristics that tie the approaches together. These include:

- Community empowerment
- Multiple areas of action
- Local design
- External linkages and resources
- Theory of change
- Strengthening the sense of community
- Taking a long-term perspective

### **Community Empowerment**

Community empowerment occurs when members of the community are involved in defining the problem and solutions and carrying out the resulting initiatives (Dalton et al., 2001). Community empowerment is not merely a matter of inviting community members to give input on what they need. It is the community members who are most affected by the problem and solutions having the primary influence and control over what happens (Dalton et al., 2001).

Community empowerment is seen most thoroughly in the consciousness raising work of MESA. In that approach, the community organizers act as catalysts and facilitators. They also provide access to resources the community would not otherwise be able to tap into. However, it is the community that defines the problems and drives the solutions. At times, this leads to activities that would not usually be considered by established organizations. For example, in working with migrant worker families to prevent sexual violence, one community worked

to change gender roles by getting fathers more involved in their children's schools. This represents community-level change because it was a fundamental shift in the expression of cultural values and gender roles for the entire community and not merely a change in a few men's individual behaviors.

Policy education and implementation can sometimes be done to better but not necessarily empower the community, but it is notable that in New Mexico, this has not been the case. Even while working with municipal governments to reduce the density of alcohol licenses, members of the Alcohol Density Task Force have adapted the problem definitions and solutions to the local context. The task force works with individual communities to implement solutions that fit their local context. For example, some communities passed new zoning ordinances while other communities fight new licensing one application at a time.

### **Multiple Areas of Action**

A notable common thread between these approaches to community-level change is that they work to bring about change in multiple areas. Change in only one area seldom leads to wider community change; rather, multiple causes of the problem must be addressed (Schorr, 1997). It may not be possible to address all aspects of a problem simultaneously. However, change agents must be clear about what they are doing, what they can accomplish, what they cannot accomplish, and what additional actions will be needed next to bring about broader, sustainable change.

The clearest example of acting in multiple areas is seen in the work of the Blackburn Center. As described earlier, their work includes:

- Policy development, administration and faculty trainings, and student education on college campuses
- Skill building for gender equity and media awareness in middle schools and high schools
- Men as Allies engagement
- Future Advocates engagement for young adults
- Broad community dialogue through social media
- Internal organizational work on policies and procedures

All of these activities are tied together by a common focus on gender equity as a foundational requirement for preventing sexual violence.

Even the more narrowly focused work of the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force in Vermont represents multiple areas of action, including:

- Forming a new task force
- Informing state legislation
- Providing technical assistance to schools
- Expanding the scope of prevention programs to be more comprehensive

## Local Design

Another characteristic of community-level change is that initiatives should be planned, implemented, and controlled locally to the greatest extent possible (Schorr, 1997). Community members know best what resources, strengths, and needs they have (Dalton et al., 2001). They also understand the history of what has and has not worked before and how community members have responded to past initiatives. This is not merely a matter of historical knowledge. It is also a matter of



understanding the values of the community. To be successful, community initiatives must be consistent with what the community values.

All of the initiatives highlighted in this report represent local planning and implementation. A useful example is seen in the [Technical Assistance Resource Guide](#) written by Vermont's Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force (2010). The guide was designed to be useful for a wide range of education stakeholders, including: classroom teachers in multiple disciplines, including but not limited to health educators; early childhood educators; school counselors; curriculum committees; and administrators such as principals and superintendents.

The guide addresses responsibilities that all adults share. For example, at the level of secondary prevention, those responsibilities include: creating environments that increase the likelihood of disclosures, knowing how to receive disclosures, responding to disclosures appropriately, and supporting children effectively following a disclosure. However, the ways adults carry out those responsibilities will vary depending on the setting, age of the child, and the adult's role.

In terms of curricula, the guide provides age-specific goals and resources. The skills, knowledge and health expectations are specific to clusters of grades (PreK-Grade 2, Grades 3-4, Grades 5-6, Grades 7-8, and Grades 9-12). To correspond with these expectations, the teaching goals, learning outcomes, logic models, and teaching resources are specific to those grade clusters. The guide is not a single template or curriculum. Rather, it walks schools through a process of choosing a curriculum and developing a prevention plan that fits their local needs, resources, and values.

## External Linkages and Resources

Another common characteristic of community-level change is that the strategies link communities to other people, organizations, and resources that can support their work. Few communities addressing a complex issue like sexual violence can solve the problem on their own. Three types of resources that the community may be linked to are: funding, knowledge, and clout (Schorr, 1997).

All communities have limitations on the resources available to them. Funding from government and foundation sources is often

required to support community-level work. The initiatives highlighted in this report have been funded through a variety of sources, including:

- Federal Rape Prevention and Education funds
- State departments of health
- State councils
- Large, philanthropic foundations
- Small, local foundations

It is important to keep in mind that funding represents not only an opportunity but also a risk. When the Blackburn Center increased their focus on gender equity in 2002 - 2004, there was talk about whether it could have a negative financial impact through

fewer referrals or decreases in donations. Fortunately, their commitment to social change was clear, they moved ahead with their plans, and have seen no decreases. To the contrary, the community has shown great interest in the social change work. However, support from funders and the community cannot be guaranteed and contingency plans should be in place.

In Vermont, the prevention work by schools was legislatively mandated but not funded. This illustrates why funding is not the only resource to link to. Knowledge or expertise is also needed and can be critical to success. Consistent with local design, knowledge is not about defining the problems or mandating specific goals (Dalton et al., 2001). Rather, it is about providing background information on the issue and technical assistance on processes. It can be helpful to provide examples from other communities to contribute to idea generation, so long as those ideas are shared in a way that the local community can choose whether to adopt, adapt, or reject them.

Finally, clout, or connections to those with political or economic power is also an important resource (Dalton et al., 2001). This is illustrated by the work of MESA, which is located in the School of Agriculture at Purdue University. Community organizers with MESA have seen how, in specific contexts, being affiliated with a university provides leverage for their work. When working with farm workers who are disenfranchised from higher education, there is little interest in or benefit of emphasizing the university affiliation. However, when collecting evaluation data or working with academics, identifying the program as part of a university provides legitimacy to the work and access to wider resources.

## Theory of Change

To be successful, community-level initiatives must be based on a plausible theory about how the change will occur (Schorr, 1997). The theory of change does not have to be one taken from published literature. It can be developed locally. Caution should be used when adopting a general theory of change taken from another source. Too often, the borrowed theory of change is cited with insufficient understanding of it and with minimal thought about how it applies to the specific initiative and context.

The Blackburn Center offers an excellent illustration of how a theory of change can be developed locally and used to advance the work. In 2013, the center was invited by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape to participate in a project to collaborate with an external evaluator to develop a change model. The change model was a diagram that illustrated how their prevention work leads to change in their community. It illustrated the short-term, intermediate, and long-term changes. Because it was drawn similar to a flowchart, it explicitly illustrated the connections and gaps between activities and the resulting chain reaction of

outcomes. It was specific to Blackburn Center and reflected both its current work and its vision for the additional changes needed to prevent sexual violence.

Since creation of that change model, Blackburn Center has used it to examine its allocation of internal resources, guide the development of new initiatives, and communicate with funders about funding needs. Although not all of the initiatives highlighted in this report described having a written model that was as detailed as Blackburn Center's, they all explained their work in terms of some theory of prevention and community change.

## Sense of Community

When successful, community-level change not only achieves its explicit goals, it also strengthens the sense of community. Sense of community is a sense of being a member of the community, a sense of influence over what happens in the community, shared values among community members, and a shared emotional connection to the community (Dalton, et al., 2001). These factors are both an important part of the process of community-level change and a consequence of it.

A sense of community is seen in all of the examples of community-level change shared in this report.

- Blackburn Center's work to create new social settings that promote gender equity builds relationships among people and gives them meaningful ways to contribute to change in their communities.
- MESA's community organizing facilitates mutual support, strengthens disenfranchised communities, and helps them influence what happens to them by acting on their experiences and values.

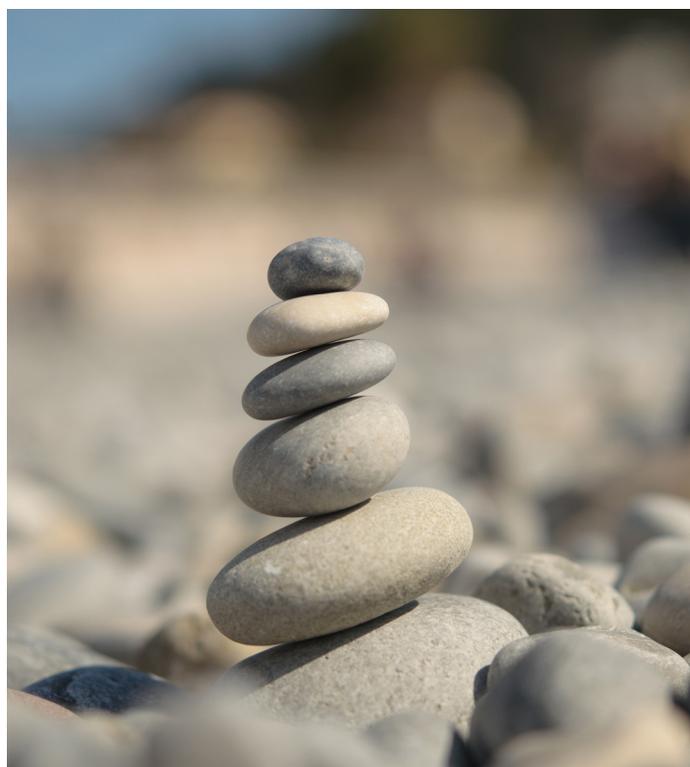
- Vermont's work through the Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force supports schools and rape crisis programs in expanding their professional roles and networks, creating solutions that are based on their community's values, and fosters a shared sense of mission.
- New Mexico's Alcohol Density Task Force empowers communities to influence their municipal governments in ways that provide greater public safety and promote public health in the community.

### Long-Term Perspective

Finally, community-level change requires taking a long-term perspective (Schorr, 1997). Community initiatives often are the result of years of building community alliances and the work they do can take years more until outcomes can be measured (Dalton et al., 2001). By building slowly and steadily over time, community-level initiatives are more likely to be sustained even when funding and other resources shift (Dalton et al., 2001).

The Blackburn Center is a clear example of the need for a long-term commitment to community change. The center's planning began with a multi-year process of building a more active Board of Directors. Over the course of four to five years, the board was expanded outside of its existing circle to intentionally recruit individuals based on specific skills they possessed and that the center needed to carry out a social change agenda.

During that same time, the center adopted a position statement on social change that made it clear that social change is a fundamental commitment of the center. The process they engaged in to write that position statement further underscores the importance of taking a long-term perspective. In the center's 2000 strategic plan it became clear that there were concepts for which the staff and board did not



have consistency and consensus on, including the role of feminism and social change. To begin the process, they hired an external facilitator and held focus groups with staff, board, and volunteers. Then over the next 18 months a work group of 11 people read theory and research on feminism and social change, articulated the position statement, and the Board of Directors adopted it. In 2002, they were ready to begin using the statement to guide their work. Since then, they have engaged in a reflective process where they try an initiative, reflect on its process and outcomes, and then make decisions about continuing, modifying, or changing the strategy.

Blackburn's social change work is also supported by a local foundation that has a vision around gender and social transformation. They have received three-year grants for their social media work and course releases for college faculty who are engaged in institutional change. This allows more time for thoughtful planning and for multi-year initiatives. Without multi-year funding, it would be difficult to carry out the work effectively or to



measure its impact.

At the same time, it is important that the long-term perspective not lock an initiative into a course that does not allow for adjustment along the way. In reflecting on the work of the Vermont Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force, staff from the Network observed that one factor that made it possible to achieve their goals is that they are “a progressive, small state and we are nimble. Because we are small, word travels fast and action is expected quickly.” The formation of the task force, inventory of what was being done for prevention in schools, and development of the technical assistance guide were successive initiatives that unfolded over four years. Rather than being part of a single, comprehensive plan, those components evolved as the needs in the state became clearer.

## Summary

Regardless of which approach to community change is taken, successful initiatives share common characteristics. They:

- Work for community empowerment
- Take action in multiple areas pertaining to the problem

- Are locally designed and responsive to the community’s history and values
- Link communities to other people, organizations, and resources to support the work
- Are based on a clear theory of how change will occur
- Build a stronger sense of community
- Take a long-term perspective

In addition to these common characteristics, it is also important to stress the need for a clear commitment to this work. As explained by one Executive Director:

*“We’re all in. Half of our mission is about prevention and transforming our community. It is core to our organization...It determines what kind of impact you’re looking for. You must have a deep, real understanding of the causes of sexual violence and how the community needs to change. The problem with many prevention programs is a lack of congruency. You have to be able to answer the question ‘Where is your commitment?’ through your actions...That includes being willing to walk away from funding if it comes from a source that works against your message.”*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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### Local Programs

Local programs can successfully implement community-level initiatives that change the culture and behaviors in the community. A few recommendations can help programs be successful:

- **Clarify how you think the community will change.** Consider other changes that have occurred or been attempted in your community. What has worked to bring about change on other issues? What has been tried and not worked? Who was involved? What motivated their involvement? What were the critical factors that led to success? Then consider the specific changes you are seeking. While reducing the incidence of sexual violence and promoting safety, equality, and respect may be your ultimate goals, what has to happen first? What does each change lead to? What are the necessary contexts for those changes to happen? It is imperative that a program have a clear theory of change before proposing an intervention to a funder.
- **Working with a skilled program evaluator** to clarify the change process you are working toward may be helpful. Having clarity about the change process will help guide your work, leverage funding, and explain what you are doing to community partners. When choosing an evaluator, it is important that they understand the unique context of sexual violence prevention and what primary prevention of sexual violence entails.
- **Be specific and realistic.** When clarifying the process of change and embarking on specific initiatives, it is important to be specific and realistic in your expectations. For example, increasing gender equity in a community is not something that can be quickly achieved. It requires community-, relationship-, and individual-level change in many areas of the community. Focus on what can be achieved in a given period of time and take steps that can bring about incremental changes in your community that have positive impacts and contribute to the potential for long-term change.
- **Break large initiatives into component steps** and allocate sufficient time and funding to each step. For example, conducting a community needs and assets assessment, developing a theory of change, and piloting an initiative may be three steps that each require a full fiscal year, rather than attempting to do all three steps in one year.
- **Ensure that goals and objectives are measurable and that necessary, intermediate changes are identified.** This will make evaluation more focused and provide data that indicates what components of the long-term process of change are being impacted and where enhanced or new approaches need to be taken.
- **Invest time and funds in bringing your entire organization on board with social change goals.** It is important that all staff, volunteers, and board members understand and are committed to your organization's social change work. Just like in the community, this process will not be effective if it comes top-down. Build understanding and skills by engaging your organization in a process of learning about community change and working through what your organization's commitment means for their role and responsibilities.

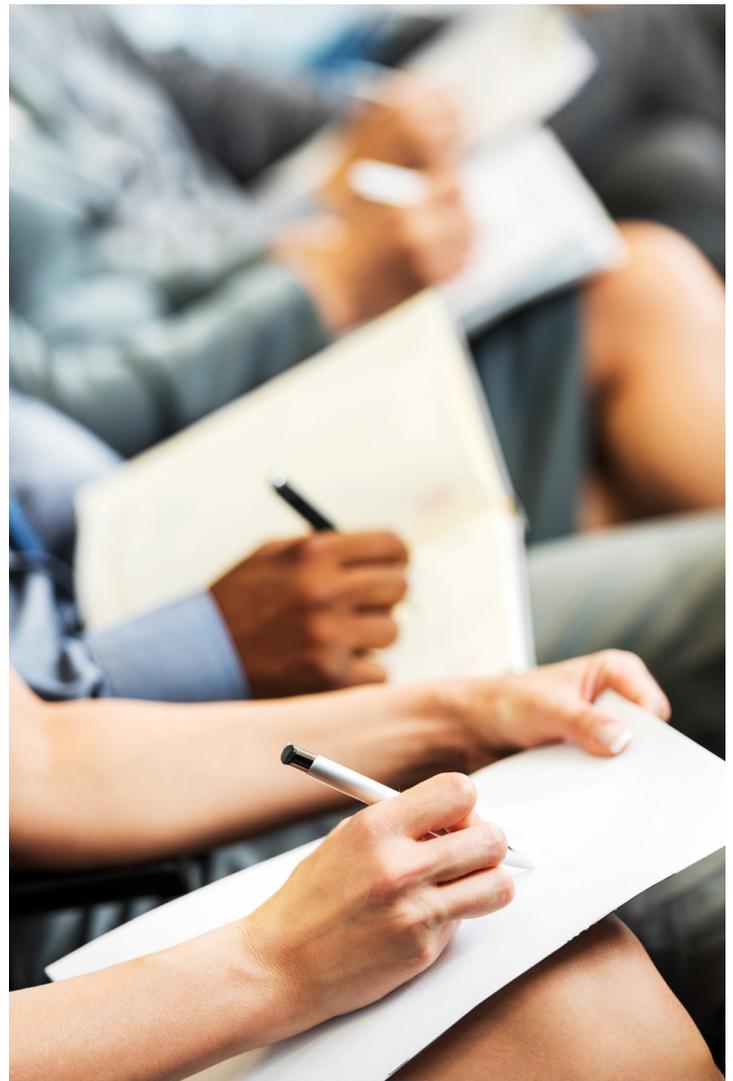
## Technical Assistance Providers

State and national technical assistance providers can support community-level change. This may be best achieved by tailoring technical assistance to the unique needs posed by community change efforts, including:

- **Develop expertise** to support community-level work. Technical assistance in this area requires unique skills. Hiring staff with diverse disciplinary backgrounds and who have experience in areas such as community organizing, social change, and social justice work can increase organizational capacity to support programs doing community-level work. Supporting professional development opportunities in disciplines such as public health, community psychology, and applied sociology can expand technical assistance providers' tools for community-level work.
- **Develop organizational capacity** for supporting community-level work. Having a logic model or theory of change for supporting local community change is an important tool for guiding technical assistance efforts. An effective technical assistance system should have a structure that is realistic and feasible to sustain.
- **Provide locally-specific technical assistance.** General presentations, workshops, and educational resources on community change can provide a useful introduction to the idea of community-level interventions. However, as even the small sample highlighted in this report reveals, there are many approaches and strategies for engaging and mobilizing communities. Therefore, the training and assistance needs of individual programs may vary widely. To be effective, technical assistance needs to be less about disseminating information and more about coaching or

mentoring staff and the communities they work with through the process of community change.

- **Help programs think beyond “what” they do to develop a clearer sense of “how” they do it.** Technical assistance providers have important roles to play in helping programs clarify the theories they are working from and how they expect change to happen in their communities. Again, this is locally-specific assistance and should be tailored to the individual community and initiatives.



## Funders and Public Health Agencies

Some funders, particularly federal agencies, are prioritizing funds for prevention programs that work beyond the individual level. However, programs engaging in this work indicate that funding requirements, from requests for proposals to monitoring surveillance and data reports, often do not align with working at the community level. There are a number of things funders can do to advance community-level prevention work, including:

- **Align requests for proposals and surveillance reports with community-level interventions.** Long-standing questions like how many individuals will be served, what curriculum will be used, and the number of presentations made do not fit the nature of community-level work. The answers to those questions underreport the intensity and extent of community-level change. When indicators like that are used for allocating funds, community-level proposals are likely to score lower than less comprehensive, individual-level interventions.
- **Fund multi-year proposals.** Multi-year funding supports the relationship building, input, and consensus processes necessary for community-level work. If multi-year proposals are not permitted, then work with grantees to distribute the project over multiple, sequential proposals.
- **Adapt evaluation requirements to align with community-level interventions.** Community change is measurable. However, the methods of evaluating these interventions are often different than for individual-level interventions. Some funders have a preference for pre-/post-test surveys that works against meaningful evaluation of community change. Other measurement and data analysis methods,

including sampling and qualitative analysis, should be supported by those funders.

- **Distinguish between the “what” and the “how” of community-level work.** When asking applicants to explain the theory their work relies on, make sure they are using not only the social-ecological model to explain what they will try to change, but that they also have a theory or theory of change (either from social science or one they have developed specific to their community) to explain how that change will happen.
- **Invest in supporting programs to clarify their theory of change.** Community-based programs have little time for the kind of learning and reflection needed to clarify their theory of change. Additionally, translating their ideas into a change model or logic model that clearly explains their work is an advanced skill that is best developed with extensive practice. Facilitating the time, resources, and access to an internal or external evaluator who can help them clarify their theory of change is a valuable way of building their organizational capacity for community change and evaluation of their work.

Funders, public health agencies, technical assistance providers, and local programs each have unique roles to play in promoting and engaging in community-level prevention. As the programs highlighted in this report illustrate, community-level initiatives are possible and promising. However, they are also complex. Sufficient investment and a long-term commitment to this work are necessary for it to succeed.

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## METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

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### **Evaluation Design and Methodology**

Interviews can provide a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs. Because they are conducted on a one-on-one basis, it is possible to go in more depth and to explore experiences and issues that an individual might be reluctant to share in a group setting. Because of their in-depth and interactive nature, interviews are an effective way of checking the validity of conclusions that the evaluator may draw from other sources of data (Singleton & Straits, 2005).

For this report, interviews were used to explore how state-level and local programs were engaging in community-level prevention work. Taking a case study approach, organizations that were known to have made particular progress in developing and implementing community-

level prevention strategies were interviewed to better understand what they are doing at the community level, what has supported their community-level work, and how they solved any problems or challenges they encountered.

### **Procedures**

The interview procedures and protocol were developed collaboratively by NSVRC and the evaluator.

Programs were selected using a uniform nomination form and rating criteria. Nominations of programs were solicited in three ways. First, an announcement was posted on NSVRC's prevention email list soliciting suggestions from the field (including self-nominations). Second, NSVRC staff identified programs based on their knowledge of and work with programs throughout the country. Third, programs that

presented on community mobilization topics at the 2016 National Sexual Assault Conference were considered.

This process resulted in eight programs identified as having made notable advances in the area of evaluation. All programs were contacted by email and four (50%) responded and agreed to be interviewed and/or to have materials from their evaluation work included. Interviews were conducted in September and October 2016 via telephone. Interviews lasted between 54 and 65 minutes.

## Interviews

The interview protocol was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are ideal in situations where the evaluator anticipates having only one opportunity to interview an individual (Bernard, 1995). The protocol includes specific areas to be covered and questions to be asked, but the evaluator is able to probe for more detail, to pursue lines of inquiry that spontaneously emerge, and to allow for a conversational tone. This method introduces a structure to the interview while still allowing people to express themselves in their own terms. It also allows for unanticipated experiences to be raised and explored.

## Data Analysis

Analytic induction was used to analyze the approaches to and processes of evaluation work among these programs. This analytic technique emphasizes the development and testing of explanatory assertions (Erickson, 1986). The evaluator developed a preliminary set of assertions based on the data. Those assertions were then tested against the data, looking for five types of evidentiary adequacy:

1. Is there adequate evidence to **support** this assertion?
2. Is there enough **variety** in the kinds of evidence that support this assertion?
3. Are there any **doubts** about the accuracy of the data?
4. Was any evidence collected that could **disconfirm** or negate the assertion?
5. Do any cases exist that are **contrary** to the assertion?

Assertions were then revised or eliminated based on their evidentiary adequacy until there was a well warranted set of assertions. Those final assertions and evidence were then presented as the findings.

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