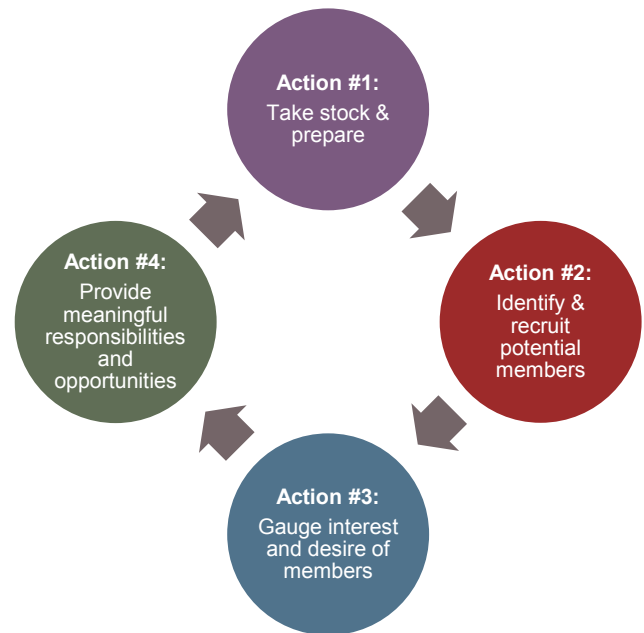


Actions to Strengthen Your Evidence-Based Program Workgroup

Prevention systems benefit from a well-functioning process for helping communities identify and select appropriate substance misuse prevention strategies. A well-established, multidisciplinary evidence-based programs workgroup, integrated into a state's, tribe's, or jurisdiction's overall prevention system, can provide this important guidance and support.¹

Unfortunately, many workgroups, established to meet the requirements of a specific funding stream or to determine levels of evidence for a specific substance, eventually lose steam as grants change or priorities shift.

This tool presents a four-step approach to strengthening and revitalizing evidence-based program workgroups so they are prepared to address current prevention priorities and meet evolving needs.



ACTION #1: TAKE STOCK AND PREPARE

Before reaching out to invite individuals and organizations to participate in your workgroup:

- **Examine the current prevention landscape and available resources.** For example:
 - *What are the primary agencies in your state, tribe, jurisdiction (S/T/J), or community that work to prevent substance misuse or related issues?* Consider including in your workgroup representatives working at both the S/T/J and local levels in order to have both perspectives at the table.
 - *What major projects are happening in your S/T/J to prevent substance misuse and related consequences?* It's important to consider those efforts and approaches that are regularly implemented as well as those that are not widely known.
 - *What expertise, skills, or resources must your EBP workgroup have or have access to?* Common experience and skills to consider including are: knowledge of system-wide prevention systems, understanding of research literature, providing training and

technical assistance, implementing prevention strategies, and using the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) process for strategic planning.

- **Understand and be able to articulate the workgroup’s goals, structure, and process.** It is critical that you are able to clearly and succinctly describe the purpose of the EBP workgroup, the value of the group, and how it functions. For example:
 - *Why is it important to establish (or revitalize) this workgroup?*
 - *How will it strengthen the state substance misuse prevention system?*
 - *What is the scope of the workgroup?* For example, is it responsible for implementing existing guidelines (i.e., levels of acceptable evidence), or also developing new ones?
 - *How often does the workgroup meet? What is the expected length of membership?*
- **Be able to articulate how new members will benefit from participation.** Before approaching new members, consider why you want that person to join, and why *they* would want to commit their time to the group.
 - *How will the workgroup benefit from the potential member’s participation?*
 - *How will the potential member benefit from participation in the workgroup?*

ACTION #2: IDENTIFY AND RECRUIT POTENTIAL MEMBERS

When considering potential members, it is important to align what you know about the current prevention landscape and available resources (gathered in Action #1) with your vision and purpose for the group. Below are some questions to discuss with your prevention team to determine if potential members have the right knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience.

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Knowledge of System-wide Prevention Efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the person’s experience and/or involvement with substance misuse prevention efforts happening in the state, tribe, or jurisdiction? • What other agencies and/or programs that also address prevention issues is s/he aware of?
Understanding the Research Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How familiar is the person with the current research literature, especially as it relates to the priority substances identified by your state, tribe, or jurisdiction? • What is the person’s experience translating research to guide state and local efforts? To what extent can s/he apply research findings to inform practice?

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Understanding the Research Literature (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the person’s understanding of levels of evidence and how to apply them, including when there are gaps in research knowledge?
Providing Training and Technical Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the person have experience providing training and technical assistance in the prevention of substance misuse or related topics? • To what extent could the person help identify and develop training and technical assistance services to help communities follow the workgroup’s guidance and recommendations?
Implementing Prevention Efforts at the Local Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How experienced is the person in implementing prevention efforts at the local level? • How experienced is the person in working with the types of grantees or populations you are likely to fund?
Using a Strategic Planning Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent does the person understand the comprehensive planning model being used in your state, tribe, or jurisdiction? • What is his/her experience using data to identify prevention priorities, creating logic models, and assessing capacity in order to select “best-fit” prevention strategies?

ACTION #3: GAUGE INTEREST AND DESIRE OF MEMBERS

Once you have new members on board, take time to explore expectations and define how you will work together. Though it is important that you stay true to your original mission, long-term success will depend largely on your ability and willingness to tap member interests and meet member needs. Here are some questions to help you do so:

- **What do members hope to get from the EBP workgroup?** Check in regularly to re-visit how membership benefits them and their work. Recognizing member needs will help you retain members and get the most from the relationship.
- **What is the scope of the workgroup?** In Action #1, you explored the workgroup’s “place” within the S/T/J’s overall substance misuse prevention system. Do members see other connections and opportunities that you didn’t originally identify? Discuss with members whether they see the workgroup as an ongoing function of the prevention system or a short-term workgroup dedicated to satisfying specific grant deliverables.
- **What additional opportunities and connections are available to the workgroup?** Are there other programs that could benefit from your work? Is there training and technical assistance you could provide? Many S/T/Js benefit from the presence of a sustained EBP workgroup that creates clear and consistent expectations for selected prevention strategies.

- **How can the workgroup best meet the needs of members?** For example, how often would members like to meet? What should happen at face-to-face meetings? Are members interested in devoting meeting time to learning about evidence-based strategies and current prevention efforts? Consider ways to increase member ownership of the workgroup; this will also help retain members over time.

ACTION #4: PROVIDE MEANINGFUL RESPONSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Discuss with the group the levels of responsibility and decision making you would like members to assume, and work together to determine a comfortable balance that is acceptable to everyone. Members will likely feel more committed to the workgroup if they understand their role and feel they are making a meaningful contribution. To this end, consider the following:

- **Identify major tasks and milestones for the workgroup.** What does your state, tribe, or jurisdiction need from the group? What definitions, processes, documents, training, or other resources will help local communities identify and select evidence-based strategies? It is helpful to consider potential products and methods, as well as content areas.

Potential products and methods might include:

- Guidance documents
- Templates
- Examples from other S/T/Js or communities
- Trainings
- Work sessions

Potential content areas might include:

- Operationalizing CSAP’s guidance document [Identifying and Selecting Evidence-based Interventionsⁱⁱ](#)
 - Creating a strategic plan and selecting strategies
 - Developing logic models
 - Identifying pre-approved strategies
 - Developing criteria for “what is evidence-based”?
 - Providing evidence and implementation guidance for potential strategies
 - Identifying subject matter experts for potential strategies
 - Evaluating selected strategies
 - Providing networking and resource-sharing opportunities among communities to support implementation of selected strategies
- **Determine how you will make decisions.** In looking at your list of workgroup tasks, identify decisions that will need to be made. Talk with members about which decisions to make collectively, and whether these should be made by consensus, voting, or another method. Again, allowing members to have decision-making authority will make the work more meaningful to them.

- **Ask members how involved they want to be in the development of workgroup products.** For example, if the group is charged with developing a guidance document, are members interested in helping to conceptualize the resource? Writing key sections? Reviewing drafts? If creating a training, what role would members like to have in its development and delivery? Clarifying these expectations will help you avoid miscommunication or missed opportunities.
- **Seek consistency and connections with other efforts.** Find out what other efforts in the S/T/J, if any, also provide definitions and guidance about strategy selection. To what extent can you collaborate with these efforts so that local communities receive consistent guidance? How can workgroup members help you build these connections or advocate for consistency?

Keep in mind that implementing these four actions is an iterative process. As prevention priorities shift, new funding streams emerge, and members come and go, you will want to revisit these steps again and again. Doing so will help to ensure the longevity and success of your workgroup over time.

i While the core functions of evidence-based program workgroups are typically shared across all EBWs, the processes and elements that states, tribes, and jurisdictions put into place to achieve them often vary considerably.

ii Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. (2009). *Identifying and Selecting Evidence-Based Interventions: Revised guidance document for the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant Program*. Retrieved from https://www.hcpcme.org/pubadmin/health/SPEP/CSAP4p56_Guidance_Jan04_2007.pdf.