Communities Coming Together: Proposal Development in the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to describe the process of preparing the proposals at the seven urban sites awarded contracts to develop Better Beginnings, Better Futures programs. To understand the evolution of programs at these sites, a grasp of the community process and of unresolved issues in the proposal development phase is essential. We hope that a clear sense of the process and issues will help other communities in their initiation of similar community-based, integrated, primary prevention programs.

BACKGROUND

Better Beginnings, Better Futures was developed as an Ontario government primary prevention demonstration project involving the Ministries of Education, Health, and Community and Social Services with additional financial support from the Federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and Secretary of State.

The stated purpose of the project was "to provide information on the effectiveness of primary prevention as a policy for children, as demonstrated by the Integrated Model of Primary Prevention" (Request for Proposals, p.3). Project goals, as outlined in the Request for Proposals, were identified as:

a) to reduce the incidence of serious, long-term emotional and behavioural problems in children;
b) to promote the optimal social, emotional, behavioural and cognitive development in those children at highest risk for such problems;
c) to strengthen the abilities of communities to respond effectively to the social and economic needs of children and their families.

Specific objectives, as identified by the Ministries, were:

a) to provide **all** children with a favourable environment in which to develop;
b) to assist the family in support of the child by;
   i) providing opportunities for parent(s) to enhance their competencies and confidences in their roles as parents, and,
   ii) reducing stressful family environments, thereby strengthening the family;
c) to promote cooperative efforts between any new program and existing community services and resources whose mandate involves children and families;
d) to provide a context for long-term Canadian research which evaluates the effectiveness of primary prevention with children.

Some general operating principles were identified by the Ministries which prospective demonstration sites were expected to respect. The focus of the project was to be on children at risk

of emotional, behavioural, social, physical, and cognitive problems, living in communities with multiple high risks for poor child development. In addition, demonstration sites were to be based in small, economically disadvantaged communities or neighbourhoods with identifiable geographic boundaries.

Potential sites were requested to choose one of two options within the broader Integrated Services Model: a) a pre-natal/infant development program integrating with preschool services (0-4 age group); or b) preschool services integrating with elementary school programs (4-8 age group). Each project also was expected to have significant involvement of local residents and community leaders and to have a strong emphasis on integrating existing community services into the initiative. It was believed that involving local community residents and service providers would make the projects stronger. In addition, potential sites were requested to identify specific program goals and objectives focusing on the integration of service providers, encouraging family and community participation and involving an existing preschool program in operation for at least one year.

Once the general demonstration project's mandate, goals and objectives had been specified, an initial document outlining the Better Beginnings, Better Futures initiative was discussed and made available at the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse's "Prevention Congress IV" in November 1989. Subsequently, a number of service providers began to meet to discuss and plan ways in which their respective communities might become involved in the initiative. Formal requests for involvement were made by the Ministries when the "Request for Proposals" was released on March 1, 1990. Proposers' Conferences were held in London, Toronto, Kingston and Sault Ste Marie from March 27 through March 30, 1990[1]. These conferences offered proposing groups an information forum at which they could meet to discuss the model and proposal selection procedures with Ministries' personnel. Interested groups were next asked to complete an Initial Application, in order to verify that they met basic qualifications. The deadline for Initial Applications was April 6, 1990. The more than 50 groups selected on the basis of these Initial Applications were notified by April 20, 1990 and given a Proposal Development Grant of $5,000 for costs that might be incurred during the formal proposal development process.

[1]A Proposers' Conference specifically for francophones was held in April, 1990.

As part of the formal proposal submission, groups were required to complete the full application form, prepare and submit a projected budget and initial workplan, certify agreement to the proposal through the inclusion of signatures of mandated representatives from all participating organizations, and solicit letters of support from other local services and organizations. The submission due date for these formal proposals was July 13, 1990. Each proposal that met these mandatory requirements was reviewed and ranked by three proposal reviewers; one from each of the Ministries of Education, Health, and Community and Social Services. The twenty most highly ranked sites were then visited by a review team to gather more information. Following these site visits, final selection decisions were made, and seven sites were chosen for the project. The announcement of these selected sites was made in January 1991. The selected sites were as follows:

4-8 age cohort

1) Cornwall located in the parish of the Nativity
(later modified to include five primary school catchment areas)

2) Etobicoke located in the Highfield Junior School catchment area

3) Sudbury located in the Flour Mill and Donovan neighbourhoods

0-4 age cohort

1) Guelph located in the Willow Road neighbourhood

2) Toronto located in the inner city Regent Park-Moss Park community

3) Ottawa located in the Heatherington-Albion-Fairlea area
(Later Ledbury was added as a neighbourhood.)

4) Kingston located in North Kingston

This report describes the development process up to the point when these seven sites were chosen as demonstration sites. Four demonstration sites were also selected in Native communities; however, the proposal development process in these communities is not discussed here.

2. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This report is based on site reports prepared by the Research Coordination Unit (RCU) site research teams who examined project files and conducted personal interviews with people who had been actively involved in putting the proposal together. The Research Coordination Unit forwarded all Site Researchers a semi-structured questionnaire to be used for these interviews (see Appendix A). The Site Researchers had interviewees and/or others involved in the project review drafts of their respective reports and give feedback. The authors of four of the seven site reports had not been involved in the initial development of the site proposals, while three authors had been actively involved. Members of the Core Research Team for Better Beginnings, Better Futures assisted in preparing three site reports and monitored the overall progress of this research.

Site reports were analyzed by the Research Coordination Unit for major themes, commonalities, differences and difficulties experienced in this phase. This **Cross-Site Report** focuses on the four main areas identified in the specific site reports. These are:

1. Proposal Development: Professional Participation
2. Proposal Development: Collaboration and Organization
3. Resident Participation
4. The Program Model Development

Throughout this Cross-Site Report excerpts from the individual site reports are provided to illustrate the proposal development process.

3. PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT: PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPATION

The purpose of this section is to identify issues and concerns raised in the site reports about professional involvement in the proposal development process. The questions of interest were: which professionals and agencies participated in the early stages, why did they participate, and how was participation facilitated? Common issues that were raised by all sites are discussed. In addition, site-specific issues are reviewed. Community resident involvement tended to begin at later stages in the program development process and will be the focus of Section 5.

MINISTERIAL GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION

In their "Request for Proposals", the Ministries indicated that the demonstration model required:

> that within a given community, services for children and families must blend and unite. Integration minimally means that service providers and educators develop common goals, objectives and collaborative plans for meeting these intents. . . .

Therefore, applicants were expected to identify strategies which would facilitate the successful participation of service agencies and schools in the demonstration project.

INITIAL INVITATIONS

While several sites had working groups prior to the formal government information session in March, 1990, at most sites project participation began with a number of individuals attending government information sessions. These individuals then brought the information back to their host agencies and other social service providers within their communities.

In all site reports, there was an indication that initial committee formation and/or participation was either at the request of a host agency or through special invitation by a small Better Beginnings, Better Futures working group. For example, as some interviewees stated:

> "He telephoned the representatives of different local agencies (7), who would potentially be interested to attend a meeting on the next day."

> "Most individuals said they became involved in the project through recruitment by other... members or because they were asked to become involved by their particular agencies."

> "From there this small group brainstormed about who else should be represented on the Steering Committee. From making contacts with different groups and agencies, several people joined this working group…"

> "[After attending a government information session], this staff person took the information back to the [agency] director and together they decided to pursue this opportunity by inviting as many agencies and organizations from (the community) which had a stake in the well-being of children and families as possible to an information meeting."

REASONS FOR JOINING

Reasons for becoming involved in working groups varied across individuals. Some people participated because of a genuine commitment to improving the lives of the people they served or to the philosophy of Better Beginnings, Better Futures, some were looking for opportunities to further their professional/personal development, and some participated because of perceived advantages to their host organization.

Value Compatibility

The Ministries indicated that one major impetus for the demonstration project was to provide an integrated service delivery model which would involve both service providers and community residents in program design, implementation and evaluation. In addition, the Ministries placed a strong emphasis on working with disadvantaged communities, rather than disadvantaged individuals or families. In the original terms of reference for the demonstration project, a priority was placed on demonstrating the value of approaches to helping children and families that were identified as "promising" in the primary prevention literature. Quite a few respondents indicated that their reasons for joining in the proposal development phase was precisely because of the promise of these features:

> "…the principal motivation of the people involved in writing the proposal was the desire to optimize the quality of services available to the [target] population… …to develop new ways to offer resources…"

> "…Many of the community residents saw the project as an opportunity to make a difference for their own neighbourhood, and a chance to have some input into something that would directly impact them."

> "…many people felt a great sense of excitement at the opportunity to be involved in something which was perceived as being innovative…"

> "…[there was] a fervently expressed belief in the value of prevention…"

> "…Several criteria or principles from the Better Beginnings, Better Futures initiative motivated people to get involved… One of these was prevention.… …Related to this was the strong emphasis on research … the emphasis on involving those people who will be accessing the services … the emphasis on integration of services…"

Personal, Professional and Organizational Development

Many respondents viewed their participation in the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project as an innovative and unique opportunity. Some saw it as a vehicle for personal learning and/or professional growth. Others were interested in the career opportunities that might evolve from their involvement. Some participants reported a frustration with the way their existing services were organized and were hopeful that Better Beginnings, Better Futures would help them to be more effective in their helping efforts. For them, the project was a natural extension of their existing jobs or of their agency's mandate. It seemed to be a natural way to link with others and to do better work.

> "…one individual noted that she was 'personally interested as a parent from the community and because of a career goal…I'm learning what I wouldn't have the opportunity to learn any other way.' "

> "…persons [were] using Better Beginnings as an oasis of creative, exciting sanity…"

> "…'it was something that I thought was interesting … could benefit our community … could help me as a person to grow' (resident)…"

> "…[this was] an opportunity to do something which had less restrictions than their existing jobs…"

> "...[there was] a feeling of frustration with the inadequacies of the services with which they were a part, and a feeling that this project provided solutions that addressed the 'real' problem, and were not just 'band-aid' services."

> "...The principal reason expressed was that it seemed a logical and natural thing to do given the professional's area of interest or because of the mandate of their program..."

> "...members saw themselves as being able to offer their services in conjunction with Better Beginnings, Better Futures..."

Some of the site reports also mentioned that acquiring money was a prime motivator for involvement. Many agencies are in the position of constantly looking for resources.

> "...Some people also mentioned that the large amount of potential money was a motivator as well. Since many agencies are in the position of constantly looking for resources, the large amount of money was a big drawing card."

> "...one individual described the hope for attaining 'any money that might be around, that we might get a hold of [for our programs]...', while another individual indicated that their agency 'wanted to be visible in a prevention project.'"

A number of respondents indicated that the main reason for involvement was that their agency supervisors requested them to participate:

> "My agency tells me I have to be involved."

> "One service provider said she became involved because her supervisor told her to..."

> "There were several people who became involved because their position was such that the project 'fell into their laps' or because they were asked to become involved by their supervisors."

Overall, the amount of money available, the innovative preventive program design and the congruency with agency priorities appear to have been the primary motivators for most agency representatives participating in the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project. Some professionals considered Better Beginnings, Better Futures activities to be a part of their workload, and others were committed to the project's overall philosophy, goals and objectives. Many respondents indicated a sense of excitement and commitment to be "values and vision" of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Primary Prevention Project.

COMMON THEMES

A number of common themes were identified in the site reports. Generally these discussions reflected the time participants were prepared to commit to the project, the constraints the Ministries were perceived to have placed on the proposal development process, the challenge of reaching agreement on decisions, and the extent of collaboration among service agencies.

Individual Time Commitments/Agency Support

There was a great deal of variation in the amount of time individuals at each site were able to devote to the project. The main reasons for these differences were individual commitment, time availability, and agency support for project involvement. The concern voiced most frequently across site reports was whether individual time spent working on the project was supported as part of one's employment responsibilities. If this involvement was not supported, the struggle of coping with other job commitments was emphasized. In the participants' words:

> "…Nearly all of the [agency people] were involved as part of their jobs…Most of them were able to free themselves up to participate because it fit with their job, but also by shifting around other obligations. Some of them said they had to fit this in on their own time by doing their other work during lunch hours, extended hours, evenings or weekends…"
>
> "…Representatives of local agencies said that another thing that limited their involvement was running their own programs in the community. One individual described having to make a choice between her commitment to the project and to her agency. She chose to focus on her agency."
>
> " '…hard for me [local agency] to give as much time as they did [people from outside agencies]…frontline staff in the community…we were running programs…it was difficult…' "
>
> "…one agency could not sustain that kind of time commitment and had to drop out of the project…"
>
> "…'[I received] not very much support, the support is that I have to be involved in this…they don't provide anything like computers or typing…this is just another thing [no relief from other duties]'…"
>
> "…Other agencies gave less support. They supported the idea, but were not willing to make an agency-wide commitment to the project.… …These participants

> were given somewhat less flexibility to be involved, but were given enough flexibility provided that they still completed their other responsibilities. Often this meant doing things on their own time…"
>
> "…Most of the individuals reported that although their agencies were supportive of the initiative and believed in it, this did not always translate into greater administrative support or time off from other responsibilities. Several individuals reported putting in a lot of their own time, including holidays, in order to complete the proposal. One individual reported that although her agency was originally supportive, she had to back out of the project because the time commitment was too great."
>
> "…one agency donated up to one full-time person to work on the project and to be the key facilitator for the development of the proposal. Additional supports included time from other people in the agency who helped to organize meetings, call people to attend and put together information to be mailed… This same agency donated the costs of mailing, photocopying, travel and administrative support. Many people… commented that if it hadn't been for the support donated… that the proposal would have gone nowhere."

In two sites, the individual time spent was more evenly spread across all of the participants. At these two sites, individuals:

> "received support from the agencies and organizations they represented. This base of moral support manifested itself concretely through opportunities for members to use the time or resources belonging to their organizations in order to develop the proposal."

An additional feature of the support provided at these sites was the fact that all members were given permission by their respective agencies to devote one full day per week to the project for over one year during the proposal development phase. Even with this support, one member had to leave the project because of conflicting work pressures.

Although "burnout" was not a common theme identified in the site reports, some expressed that they felt "burned out" by the experience. One community resident who was very active in the proposal development commented:

> "Yeah, but it was definitely a work load. I took some time out because it was so intense before… I burned out and I took some time… now [my partner] gave me the go-ahead to get involved again but …, I won't be giving more than a couple of hours once or twice a week…"

Implications of Ministries' Specifications and Timelines[2]

The impact of the Ministries' Guidelines on the proposal development phase was a common discussion topic across the site reports. The Ministries' specifications reportedly caused some of the site representatives to feel that the project was being defined by the government, rather than by the communities, especially with regard to issues such as site location, cohort focus and integration of services. These constraints will be more completely discussed in later sections. Some site reports emphasized the perceived tension between adhering to the defined mandate in the Terms of Reference for the project and ensuring that community needs were being addressed. For example:

> "In the development of the proposal, there was tension between making sure to identify and address the needs expressed by the community and including the components recommended by the Ministry. The issue of government-defined versus community-defined prevention continues to be a source of frustration for (community)."

Furthermore, although the Ministries were able to provide the sites with a general definition of integration, this concept was not clear to many. For example, one site report stressed that the lack of specificity was particularly problematic for their site:

> "The Ministry did not emphasize ways to facilitate integration of initiatives involving the three jurisdictions, and this lack of solutions for integration has continued to detract from constructive program development… Positive attitudes about integration at the service delivery level mean nothing without concomitant understanding and financial support at the administrative level."

The architects of Better Beginnings, Better Futures hoped that community residents would be active participants in the proposal development process from the beginning. At two sites there was sustained and vigorous effort to involve community residents resulting in much higher levels of participation than were found at the other five sites. (Details are provided in Section 5.) The complex requirements of proposal development, the relatively short time frames to do the work, the large amount of work required to be successful, and the need to involve multiple professionals from the beginning were seen as difficulties in involving community residents to be equal partners in the early stages of the endeavour.

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[2]This discussion focuses on the experiences and opinions of local site participants as expressed in the site reports. As such, it does not include the perspectives of Ministries' representatives.

The problem of time demands, both in terms of high workloads and short preparation time, was described in all site reports as very serious. This is illustrated by the following quotation:

> "There are indications that the time constraints in [developing] the proposal had some negative effects on the way things were done. Some major issues were not being fully discussed and resolved and there was not enough time to plan on how to spend the seed money."

In passing, we might add that the contrast between the tight timelines for proposal submission and the delay between submission and acceptance caused some interviewees to comment on how disruptive these delays had been:

> "The extended length of time between proposal submission and proposal acceptance was perceived to have hampered the growth of a high quality program. While waiting for the results… there was an 'antsy' feeling of anticipation, a feeling of being in limbo…The result was that the momentum of community involvement--both professional and resident was lost.
>
> " 'I don't think the Ministries know what they put us through…I don't think it was really thought through…how it would affect the professions…community development…we couldn't do it."

Initial Discussions and Decisions

By far the most common area of activity early in the proposal development process had to do with sharing ideas and discussing options for the site projects. All sites devoted considerable time and effort to the process of discussing a variety of issues:

> "…a lot of sharing of different ideas which could be included in such a project…"
>
> "…development of the program model (which involved defining goals and objectives and outlining programming that would meet these goals and objectives…"
>
> "…the philosophy of the project; the needs and resources of the community;…what should be the focus of the program…"
>
> "A variety of things seem to have been discussed in the initial meetings including the philosophy of the project, the needs and resources of the community, who should be involved in the development of the proposal and how they could work together, what should be the focus of the program, the method of conducting the needs assessment and representation of different ethnic groups. As well, one individual mentioned that in the initial meetings, the different people involved were

> looking at the project from different perspectives, according to their own career or life experiences."
>
> "Generally discussions were marked with a high degree of excitement and enthusiasm...The discussion of which community would be best for such a project took the most time. This included discussions about how communities were to be defined, and what characteristics the funders were looking for in a community."
>
> "The major tasks of the Steering Committee that needed to be done included conducting focus groups to identify the needs of the community, writing up the needs assessment, developing job descriptions for Better Beginnings staff, deciding upon the program design, collecting letters of support and writing the proposal. The Steering Committee was involved in a large amount of discussion and planning for tasks…".
>
> "The major task and issue that needed to be addressed in order to develop the proposal was how to get community people involved."
>
> "There were <u>many</u> discussions in (site) meetings on definitions of community, how to get representative persons, and worry that the (site) was missing something."

Collaboration Among Agencies

Agency Representatives generally were very positive about their experiences in working together developing the Better Beginnings, Better Futures proposal. Notwithstanding this enthusiasm, interagency conflicts appeared to have caused substantial concern at some sites. However, these conflicts were not described as having seriously hampered the proposal development phase of the project. Generally, the tensions among agency representatives occurred because of different philosophical understandings of service delivery, integration and collaboration. In addition, some site reports indicated that personal agendas resulted in factions and power struggles. The following are examples of some of the interagency conflicts described in the site reports:

> "…Most frequently, these tensions stemmed from two particular areas: philosophical differences and the power or role of one of the initiating groups involved in the project..."
>
> "…Several [interviewees] added however that each, naturally and expectedly, had her/his own agenda. Related to this was the concern that a small group of people had too much power."

> "…[Some interviewees had] a perception that agency politics played, as always, a major role. As one stated, there are competing boundaries, competing funding pots and competing philosophies…"

> "…the difficulties [mentioned several times] seem to hinge on the varying understanding or translation into practice of 'integration'. Certain agencies were asked to have a particular type and amount of involvement but representatives stated it was outside the agencies' mandate. Accordingly there was and still is extensive negotiation about the structure of their involvement."

> "…[one individual felt] that there were 'factions' among the group and sensed that there was one agency which was reluctant to become involved in the project."

> "…I had some concerns that the control was through a very mainstream organization…you have very mainstream groups…very few grassroots agencies…The kind of structures that each of the agencies had were different and with the different structures you get a different perspective…I don't think it was within their [i.e., the mainstream organization's] scope about how to reach out to immigrants…There were grassroots organizations in the community that should have been involved…"

Despite these tensions among organizational representatives that arose at some sites during the proposal development phase, most site reports indicated that those involved had a positive experience in creating the proposal. It was suggested that this experience contributed to a sense of cohesion and enthusiasm among participants:

> "…the collaboration and the greater agreement amongst the member organizations was relatively peaceful during the length of the process…the joint work was possible and desired by all the representatives from the involved organizations."

> "…participants spoke about the absence of 'turf' issues…"

> "…The overwhelming impression of the agency participants in the proposal development process was that the experience of working together was positive. Nearly all the participants identified the high level of shared commitment to the project and its goals as being the central reason why the group was able to work together so well."

> "…another person described simply that 'it's nice to work with people…that I like…you have a team spirit'…"

> "…most respondents mentioned general good feelings regarding the group's ability to work together… …two individuals specifically mentioned the strength of the Steering Committee in working as a team…"

> "…the best part of the work to date was 'the way we worked together in the group and the power of a good group process and team building'…"

> "…The service providers felt, in general, that the various agencies got along extremely well, worked very 'professionally' together and respected each other's points of view… …'There was a sense of excitement that we could all strengthen what we were doing by having more contact with each other and working together in some ways…I was impressed by the lack of competitiveness at the meetings'…"

> "…the steering group participants made a commitment to continue the project even if funding is not granted… the proposal development process… provide a catalyst for (further work)"

> "…Almost everyone interviewed agreed that the group worked well together. People mentioned that everyone was cooperative, that there were no conflicts, and that everyone listened to each individual's perspective."

The proposal development process was characterized by a spirit of excitement. The project is an ambitious community development initiative, and by its nature, requires passion and commitment to change. For the most part, those involved in the proposal development process were energized by and committed to the opportunity of making an important difference through the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project.

SUMMARY

Not surprisingly, the site reports indicated that there were both satisfying and frustrating experiences in getting started on the Better Beginnings, Better Futures proposal development process. Overall, the site reports communicated that a sense of positive excitement was generated by the proposal development process and many reported that the process of collaboration between organizations and various professions was new and rewarding. Obviously, the tensions experienced did not prevent the development of successful proposals at these sites; however, in all likelihood, they did influence the quality of the proposals submitted and, perhaps more importantly set the stage for the challenges that would be faced during the first year of program development at the sites.

The Terms of Reference for proposal development were described as creating several substantial challenges for proposal development at these sites. Chief among these were the difficulties described for all sites with the heavy workload and brief timeline for proposal development. With the exception of two sites, resident involvement in helping with the proposal was noticeably low, mainly because of the tight time constraints. Site reports also mentioned that the long delay between proposal submission and project selection slowed down and, in some cases, put on hold the community development process at the sites.

Site representatives described their struggle to balance what they saw as the competing requirements of the proposal development process. Some examples include: responding to government criteria for a strong submission and allowing the local community to define the program; including the elements associated with "effective" program models that were identified in an earlier literature and research review for Better Beginnings, Better Futures and basing the program on local community needs; and involving all relevant service providers in defining and delivering the model while ensuring substantial community resident influence over the process as well. Most site reports indicated that there was difficulty in understanding the definition of integration and coordination for the project and how these concepts were to be reflected in the proposal. Clearly, site representatives saw the process of responding to these challenges in the proposal development phase as complex and demanding.

Interagency conflict and competition among professionals did have an impact on how the proposals were developed at several sites. More striking, however, was the positive language used to describe the experience professionals working together on the project. For many, this seemed to be a new and unique experience.

One of the positive aspects of proposal development was the commitment to the Better Beginnings, Better Futures principles that was stimulated through working together. This was a major reason given by many people for participating in the project. It may be that the ideas of primary prevention do have the power to inspire extraordinary efforts in local communities when presented in a careful and officially supported fashion as in the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project.

4. PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT - COLLABORATION AND ORGANIZATION

INTRODUCTION

Once the core participants in the proposal development phase of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures project were recruited and initial tasks were assigned the processes of collaboration and organization began in earnest. The site reports suggest that each group confronted some unique challenges in their work. However, there were common concerns across all of the sites. These included: the development of organizational structures in order to research and prepare the proposal; the initiation and duration of the developmental processes; the frequency of meetings; the use of the seed money; the allocation of responsibilities and tasks; and, the handling of differences of opinion and conflict.

DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

The types of organizational structures that developed at the sites determined how decisions were made. Four of the site reports described a lack of formal organizational structure. In each of the other sites, the organizational structure was more complex and formal. However, each site did have some basic way of organizing themselves during the proposal development process.

In the most informal structure, one site had a single committee that consisted of agency representatives. Although minutes were taken at meetings, there was no formal chair or secretary.

At another site, there was also no formal leader, but rather an informally recognized "leader behind the group". This site developed a smaller working group of seven to eight people who had more time to commit to completing the proposal. This working group had a chair, and regularly reported to a larger steering group.

A third site had a large community coalition, and a steering committee. The steering committee had a rotating chairperson initially, but after some time assigned a regular chairperson, who also acted as the contact person with the government Committee. Interviewees at this site described some lack of clarity regarding the roles of the Coalition and the Steering Committee:

> "While one individual described needing to take ideas from the Steering Committee to the Coalition for approval and direction, another individual described decisions being made solely by the Steering Committee."

Concerns were also raised by three people interviewed at this site regarding the inefficiency of this structure:

> "…'it wasn't overly structured. We didn't have a master plan'…"

> "…'[in choosing individuals for roles] we had no discussion about whether [the individuals] were qualified or not'…"

> "…'no one had thought about the structure then…[one member] really, didn't want the traditional language and the traditional Board, and now the Steering Committee is going back to the traditional model'…"

These respondents stated that the lack of planned structure led to inefficiency and disorganization in the proposal development process.

Another site developed a non-hierarchical, four-pronged organizational framework. Individuals on the core steering committee also were members of one or more of the following task groups: Program Planning Group, Research Planning Group, Community Participation Planning Group, and the Political Support Planning Group. These task groups reported back to the Steering Committee after doing much of the groundwork for the proposal development.

Similarly, another site had a core council, with three sub-committees: the Coordination and Integration Committee, the Proposal Drafting Committee, and the Budget Committee. As well, the council nominated a Proposal Development Coordinator and a representative group for the formal presentation of the proposal to the Review Team. The role of council chairperson alternated between two members. In order to manage some of the tasks, this site:

> "followed the regular (formal) rules of procedure during its regular meetings and that each [meeting] is supported by a particular agenda and detailed minutes."

LENGTH OF PROCESS AND FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

Each of the sites began meeting regularly after the initial information sessions with the government personnel. Two groups began meeting as early as December 1989, while another two followed soon after in January 1990. However, one group did not begin meeting until April 1990, and another site did not convene its larger working groups until May 1990. Therefore, while

some sites had as long as six to seven months to prepare their proposals for the July 1990 due date, others had only two to three months for the same work.

The frequency of meetings differed across sites, but also varied within particular sites depending on individual levels of involvement in the project, the responsibilities of different committees, and the stage in the proposal development process. For example, at one site the larger group met every three to four weeks, with a smaller group meeting weekly until the proposal was submitted. At another site, also with multiple levels of organization, coalition meetings were held on a monthly basis, while the steering committee met bi-weekly, and in the busy times, weekly depending on the amount of work to be done. Smaller ad hoc task work groups also met quite frequently. Similarly, at a third multi-level site, eight large meetings were held for the broader community, while the core group or association met weekly over 42 weeks. This core group also spent one full-day workshop at the sponsoring agency. The fourth multi-level site held larger planning sessions monthly, for a total of three, and their steering committee also met on a monthly basis. Small task groups met more frequently. In addition, three half-day workshops were held at this site. In these four sites, larger groups met less frequently, and these meetings were used for information sharing and general planning and decision-making. In each of these cases, there were smaller working groups meeting more frequently in order to complete specific tasks and to make more detailed decisions.

Two sites did not use a larger working group. In both of these locations, a core group met frequently in order to complete the tasks. The first site report did not indicate why there was not a larger planning group. At the second site, it would appear that the short length of time available for proposal preparation was a considered an impediment to developing a larger working group.[3]

USE OF PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Each site received a $5,000 Proposal Development Grant when their initial application was selected. This seed money was used for expenses such as hiring of staff to support the process, covering participation basic costs (transportation, childcare, food), administrative/secretarial expenses and promotional costs. Four of the six sites[3] used some, and, in one case, all of their

[3]Only six sites are discussed because this information was not available in the seventh Site Report.

grant to hire individuals for specific proposal development tasks, although these tasks varied greatly from site to site:

> "…the greater portion of this sum was allocated to costs incurred by the project coordinator: the partial release from his regular duties, consultation fees…"

> "The Steering Group used [all of] the seed money to hire a community development worker on a fulltime basis for nine weeks from May 14, 1990 to July 13, 1990. The purpose of hiring a community development worker was to address an element of the proposal that the Steering Group felt they were unable to adequately achieve on their own. This element was the involvement and participation of the residents of the selected community in the proposal."

> "…a substantial amount [of the seed money] was used for the purchase of the services of a researcher to obtain the demographic statistics."

> "The majority of the money was used to hire the consultant.… …Each individual [on the Steering Committee] would submit information to the consultant who helped the group clarify issues and write the proposal."

> "…we used all of the money to carry out a community development process to put the proposal together. This included using money for childcare, food and transportation so that community people could attend meetings. No money was used to hire anyone or to cover administrative or secretarial expenses… (The government) approved the use of the funds that remained in July 1990 for a community celebration to celebrate that one had finished the proposal."

Two of the sites did not put any seed money toward hiring. However, one of these sites did use a Canada Employment Grant to hire a trainee at the sponsoring agency, "with part of her time to help with Better Beginnings." At the second site, two interviewees discussed their frustration at what they perceived was a lack of clarity in the Ministries' guidelines regarding spending restrictions. They had believed that the seed money could not be used for hiring people to assist in conducting the needs assessment or writing the proposal. In their words:

> "…one of the things you weren't supposed to use the seed money for is to write the proposal…and a couple of groups did that…they did it in such a way that it didn't look like they did. "

> "…we didn't hire someone to do [the needs assessment and results] because we were told we couldn't do it, [but others did it]."

As a result, this site used only half of the grant money and returned the remaining portion. This was the only site that did not use the bulk of the available money.

All but one site used seed money to defray the basic costs of supporting participation in the proposal development process. For example, three sites described using the money for food or refreshments; one site paid transportation for residents and two offered childcare services during meetings. Another site used part of the seed money to advertise and promote the project (flyers and Canada Day celebration display). In most cases the seed money was spent in an attempt to involve residents in the process.

Three of the sites had administrative or secretarial costs for which they used portions of their grants. One site used the money "to purchase secretarial services and other technical supports (photocopying, materials, etc.)", while another site's expenses included "typing… making copies of the needs assessment results as well as the proposal… and liability insurance". The third site used money for printing costs. Three sites allocated part of the budget to the purchase of office supplies.

Although it was not raised as an issue at most cases, one site had "difficulty finding an agency that was willing to be responsible for the [seed] money." At this site no one agency was comfortable in taking on the role of sponsoring agency. When an agency finally accepted this role, it did so with reluctance.

COMPLETING THE TASKS

After the initial phase of making decisions on how to begin, assigning roles and responsibilities to complete the required work became the focus of attention. The methods used in carrying out these tasks varied across and within sites depending on the work at hand. For the most part, work allocation was based on self-selection, namely, whoever felt he/she had the expertise and time available for a job would volunteer. For example:

> "The expectation on members was to state when and what they wished to do. Others would help and support."

Tasks were also assigned based on individuals' or agencies' willingness to make their time available to the project. At sites in which some participants were given relief from other work duties, these people tended to take on more responsibility than others. For example, at one site:

> "one community worker …was allowed time as part of her job to do a lot of the research and data collection…and contributed a lot of her time specifically to putting together the supporting information for the location."

> "a staff person devoted half of his time for approximately six weeks to developing the program framework and model based on extensive research into other programs."

In those sites where people were hired using seed money, those people often took on specific responsibilities such as completing a needs assessment, involving residents, coordinating meetings and writing the proposal.

The participation of residents in completing this work was highlighted at two sites. In one instance, through the efforts of a community developer a neighbourhood group was created to facilitate resident participation during the proposal development process. At the second site, an extensive consultation process with residents was carried out:

> "very much involved in reading and revising many drafts of the proposal, and also identifying needs of the community."

> "…as many as 100 residents were involved in contributing to the development of the proposal. There was a small group of people, whose time was donated by their agency, who did 12 focus groups… The responses from these groups were used as the basis upon which the goals and objectives were developed; how support was built into the proposal for continuing community participation; and, to guide the development of the model. After the focus groups were completed, biweekly meetings were held, which included community residents, to put together sections of the proposal. Although few community residents actually wrote the proposal, all involved reviewed everything that was included. A large mailing list was kept up to date and all those on the list received information and were informed of all meetings and what took place at each meeting."

At another site, two residents took on the task of conducting the needs assessment.[4]

The problem of completing tasks was made all the more difficult because of the changing composition of the working groups with some original members withdrawing and new members joining. The impact of the withdrawal of original members and of orienting new members appears to have had a significant impact on group consistency at four of the six sites:

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[4]A reviewer at this site pointed out that one of these residents had post-secondary education and this was helpful in this job.

> "Some agency people withdrew from the proposal development process for three main reasons according to those interviewed: the focus of their job was at an inappropriate level in their agency hierarchy for the task at hand…; as the group gained focus, it was obvious that the proposal was outside the mandate of their organization…; there was no further request for the person's services."

> "Most changes in the group's membership, both additions and departures, occurred in an unplanned fashion…These unplanned and uncontrolled changes were described as a concern because of the lack of consistency in the planning group that the changes caused."

It is interesting to note that at one site, the change in membership was not seen to cause any difficulties in work group consistency or cohesion:

> "In the beginning a number of people came to the meetings for information, but eventually they dropped off because either they or their agencies were not sufficiently interested or committed to continue. At the early meetings there were still agencies who were unaware of the project and the Steering Group, so participants were asked to continue to spread the word to any others whom they thought might be interested. There was a commitment to have as broad representation as possible, so when new people heard about it after the initial meetings and came to a meeting they were welcomed and encouraged to join. For that reason, there were periodic new arrivals who became committed participants right up until the time the proposal was submitted."

Government expectations significantly influenced how proposal development responsibilities were assigned. At one site, assigning responsibility for the task of proposal writing became quite problematic because of the amount of information that needed to be covered in the proposal. Another site report commented on participants being unable to give the necessary time to complete the required tasks:

> "Another major issue had to deal with the amount of information that had to be covered in a proposal and trying to be sure that they could do that. Some of the difficulty was actually finding people to write sections of the proposal, they managed to do that, but it was difficult. They managed to have several different writers so that there was no one person who wrote the proposal."

> "Several people mentioned that one of the main reasons why individuals left the group was because the time commitment was too great. Two individuals mentioned that several individuals either fell into the background or dropped out of the group because they did not believe in the project or buy into the process. One person mentioned that several people contributed what they wanted to the process and then left the group."

CONSENSUAL DECISION-MAKING

The ability of the working groups to come to agreement in completing tasks was a major issue identified in all site reports. Although all groups indicated that decisions generally were arrived at through consensus, how each group defined consensus varied: at some sites consensus was usually employed, but voting was used to resolve issues on which it could not be obtained, while at other sites no votes were ever taken. Quotations from the site reports describe both the complexity of the issues with which participants were dealing and how consensus was achieved:

> "Individuals described the main decision-making procedure that was used at meetings as being consensus. Several people noted that there was very little dissension or disagreement in preparing the proposal…Two individuals did not recollect ever voting. However, several respondents noted that votes occurred, although infrequently, on larger issues in which consensus could not be reached...Overall there were three main concerns with the way decisions were made. The time constraints led to rushed and ineffective decision making. There was also a concern that a smaller group of individuals were very influential. Some people were not satisfied with the way the consensus style of decision making was used."

> "There was no formal decision making procedure established … during the development of the proposal. Because there was no formal organizational structure and no formal leadership … decisions were made on an informal consensus basis. When decisions needed to be made, the process usually involved discussion until a position was reached with which everyone in attendance could accept. However, there were not formal voting procedures, but rather a process in which people were invited to voice their disagreements or concerns. When no such concerns were raised, then the group accepted this as a decision. As well, there were no procedures for including the concerns or opinions of those who were not present at particular meetings in which decisions were made. Despite the informality of this procedure, the process worked smoothly and allowed decisions to be made quickly and effectively.. Rarely were there occasions when decisions were made with which individuals strongly disagreed."

> "Decision-making in all meetings was based on consensus; no voting took place. The word consensus is used with some reservation, however… Some suggested that a small group was privy to most of the information, talked informally among themselves and made decisions between meetings... This was declared not a condemnation of process; rather, an acknowledgement of time constraints, the exigencies of the funders and of institutional frameworks that make alternative decision-making difficult."

> "Decisions were made based upon consensus. No voting was conducted and there was a general feeling expressed by several of the respondents that the group wanted everyone to feel comfortable with the process. When issues arose and decisions had to be made, the committee members discussed them and they generally came to consensus with respect to the different issues."

> "The choice of using consensus as a decision-making process was selected as a very good way to ensure that people would take time to talk, and to find areas that they were comfortable with and could work together on. Participants who were less familiar with consensus decision-making (and that was the majority of the [Steering Group's] members) struggled with what it meant. Sometimes people didn't know when a decision was made. Some worried it was used for even very small decisions. Others wondered if we were too 'engaged' together about everything. Those who missed meetings also did not know some of the decisions made…Consensus meant that each person…had to take time to comment and specifically approve or disapprove…"

> "The minutes from (site) clearly show that each decision was supported by a formal resolution. We have also discerned that the decisions were generally reached by consensus. The decisions relating to the project's theoretical framework, the model to be followed, the components to be included in the proposal, etc., were made after presentations on each subject by (site) during the course of the regular meetings… However, more concrete, practical decisions, such as the site of the project, were made only after receiving approval from the governmental authorities.

The language of the reports generally communicates satisfaction with the consensual decision-making procedures used. At most sites, consensual processes were seen as a way to comfortably involve more people in decision-making. However, there were some concerns expressed about the lack of clarity in how consensus was to be reached and whether consensus was appropriate for all types of decisions. Some respondents wondered whether decisions were not being unduly swayed by a smaller group of influential leaders.

This was particularly true at one site in which three concerns about consensus decision-making were expressed, namely that a small group of people were privy to most of the pertinent information necessary to make the decisions, that some representatives were especially good at convincing the overall group of their position, and that key members would sometimes make decisions between meetings:

> "[people] who could convince the rest of the group that their idea was the best of all... You know some people are really really good. They can convince the group--oh, it's a great idea--and then after you think about it, it's not such a great idea."

> "It seemed to be a consensus of if-no-one-disagreed-then-everyone-must-have-agreed."

AGENCY COLLABORATION

One beneficial effect of the collaborative process among agency representatives described in the site reports was the ability to share ideas and decide collectively on the focus for the projects. The site reports suggest that the experience of working together in developing the proposal was generally a positive experience for the professionals involved. Overall, the site reports identified a high level of shared commitment to the demonstration project and its goals. One site report said that the reason for this shared commitment was due in part to the fact that a number of participants had a history of collaboration prior to this undertaking. However, even this site report indicated that there were additional factors that contributed to collaboration in the proposal development process. Primary among these was participants' inspiration by the Better Beginnings, Better Futures principles and goals:

> "...[M]any of the participants described their experience working together with the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Steering Group as being different than their experiences in other interagency committees or groups. There was a sense that somehow this project was special. Some talked about the extra sense of commitment and excitement that participants felt as being different from their other experiences. Others mentioned that a special bond formed among the Steering Group participants which went beyond professional commitment to a common goal. This bond was described as being more personal and related to the extent to which participants shared a commitment to a goal that was 'close to our hearts' in a way that was different from other professional goals."

To suggest that there were no problems in these collaborative efforts would be misleading. Four site reports indicated that there were, on the part of the participants, difficulties in integrating and/or collaborating with one another. Two site reports commented on competing interests between participating agencies and the development of factions within the task groups. However, even where these difficulties were described, not all participants perceived the problem to the same extent:

> "Almost everyone interviewed agreed that the group worked well together. People mentioned that everyone was cooperative, that there were no conflicts and that everyone listened to each individual's perspective…However one individual mentioned that there were some problems. This individual thought that there were 'factions' among the group and sensed that there was one agency which was reluctant to become involved in the project."

Two other site reports indicated that some of the difficulties in collaborating had to do with the power differential between the sponsoring agency or a small core group of organizations and other participating agencies:

> "I remember hearing rumours of friction but I was not a party to anything…And yet I remember hearing, or having other people say, that they think there is too much control at the steering end."

Several respondents at one site indicated that, in addition to power differentials and factionalism, there were ideological differences among members/agencies:

> "…ideology and the behaviour that flows from that…there is a lot of naivety with working with low-income people… developing consensus was difficult when there were a lot of differences…there was more potential for conflict (different ideologies, mandates, etc.)… we got into more process problems as a result…"

> …there was tension there (between the clinical types versus those with community orientation), but to me that was not a major issue in terms of the actual proposal itself… we weren't chummy chummy… but there were things to work out… different philosophies."

The process of agencies working together to develop the Better Beginnings, Better Futures proposal was usually described in positive terms. While problems of self-interest, power and ideology did surface at a number of sites, they were generally considered secondary to the successes in working together. It also seemed that the principles and goals underlying the Better Beginning Better Futures Project did have the power to inspire the efforts to cooperate among these professionals.

SUMMARY

Most of the site reports described the Better Beginning Better Futures proposal development process as providing a vehicle for positive collaboration among agency representatives that would not otherwise have taken place in these communities. Many

respondents stressed that the goals and principles of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project had inspired them and sustained their involvement. There was a commitment to what the demonstration project was designed to accomplish. Of course, there were conflicts around differing organizational self-interests and control over the demonstration project's resources as well as about ideological differences over various approaches to helping. Nonetheless, these struggles did not change the overall conclusion in each site report that the opportunity for agencies to work collaboratively was appreciated and considered worthwhile.

Pressures to get the required work done in a relatively short time were described for each site. Finding people with the time and the ability to do the required work was a challenge at most sites and, not surprisingly, much of the work tended to gravitate to smaller numbers of people who could devote more time to the effort. A consistently high level of participation was difficult to maintain at most sites.

There was also substantial variation in the time invested across sites in proposal development. Time spent ranged from two to seven months to develop the proposals. Most sites had smaller working groups meeting weekly or more often during the peak periods of work. Larger consultative or formal decision-making groups met less frequently.

The Proposal Development Grant money generally was used to pay for staff to work on the needs assessment or on proposal writing and to support the direct costs of participation in the process. One site used the money to pay a community worker to form a local residents' group which then had direct input into proposal development. Representatives of one site complained that they did not understand the money could be used to hire staff support and, as a result, they did not use all of their grant.

There was quite a bit of variation in the complexity of the organizational structures created to manage the proposal development process at each site. One site, ostensibly because of time pressures, created a single committee to carry out the work. A second approach was to have a larger consultative or decision-making group and a smaller core group meeting more frequently. The more complex approaches featured large coordinating groups and three or four smaller working groups. Whatever the organizational structure, individuals and ad hoc groups carried out background work and specific jobs required by the formal groups. Not surprisingly, there were

some complaints about a lack of clarity in assigned roles and responsibilities, and about the time and effort required to make these structures function effectively.

Perhaps most striking was the evolution of consensual decision-making procedures at all seven sites. In one case, consensual decision-making seemed to be a convenient way of reaching less important decisions within an otherwise formal committee process. However, in most instances, consensual decision-making seems to have been a deliberate choice that was important to participants. Consensual decision-making was described as vital to ensuring good participation and commitment to the demonstration project, although definitions of consensus did vary across sites. For many influential participants, consensual decision-making was considered as a value in its own right. There was clearly a convergence of opinion among the people occupying key positions at the sites for this way of working. However, there were some who reported difficulties with the lack of clarity and the time required to reach consensus, as well as the tendency of smaller core groups to exercise too much influence over decisions.

5. RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION

This section of the report focuses on the involvement of local community residents in the proposal development phase of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project. Resident involvement, was described as minimal at five sites during the proposal development process. Two sites reported that quite a few residents were actively involved in proposal development.

One site report mentioned that residents heard about the Better Beginnings, Better Futures initiative in a less formal way than did service providers. Information to residents appears to have been communicated mainly through personal conversation with individual service providers already involved in the initiative. Other ways of informing residents included: door-to-door flyers, newspaper advertisements, and hosting or participating in neighbourhood events.

Five site reports described their attempts to facilitate resident involvement at each phase of proposal development, although four of these site reports indicated that the level of resident involvement was not what was hoped for. Four site reports indicated that resident involvement was sought as a source of information for the needs assessment.

These four sites solicited community involvement in a needs assessment in different ways. At one site, focus groups were conducted with members of different ethnic communities, and with parents at drop-in centres. Individual interviews were also held with residents from the native community. At another site, a survey was distributed to parents in the community. This survey was translated into Punjabi which was the predominant language spoken by non-English speaking residents. At the third site, a community developer was hired, to build contacts and relationships with neighbourhood residents and, to a lesser extent, with service providers. This person surveyed social and health service providers and consulted community residents. At the fourth site, 12 focus groups were used to consult residents and residents participated in bi-weekly meetings to develop the proposal.

For those sites where efforts at resident involvement involved more than information gathering, attempts were made to offer participants assistance with childcare and/or transportation in order to encourage involvement. One site also described attempts to make meetings less

formal, asking residents for their opinions in meetings, and encouraging resident input individually (outside of meetings) since sharing at large meetings was difficult for many residents.

> "I felt like my input was important... I felt that I was listened to and that a sincere effort was made to include the things people in the community had to say. People were kept well informed... the experience was very positive for me... a lot had to do with the way I was treated... with respect."

Another site described set policies regarding stipends, childcare and travelling expenses, created smaller working groups and attempted to develop a one-on-one system, matching service providers with residents:

> "...child care was paid for. Children were made welcome when babysitting could not be arranged. Some service providers remember driving residents home after meetings. Other professionals encouraged one-on-one verbal input, accepting that input at large meetings was difficult for many residents and that this was their level of comfort. An attempt was made to make meetings less formal. At some meetings lunches were brought and there was always "coffee and goodies". Community residents were specifically asked for their opinion."

BARRIERS TO RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

The seven site reports identified a number of barriers to effective resident participation. These included the short timelines to complete the proposal, the complex information and technical knowledge required for the proposal, and the unbalanced relationship between participating residents and professionals.

The time allowed by the Ministries to prepare the proposal frequently was identified as a barrier to effective resident involvement. It was suggested that the time frame did not allow the necessary time to cultivate and support resident involvement. The site reports consistently described the sense of frustration felt by respondents with the proposal development timelines:

> "...the provincial government talked a lot about getting the community involved but the reality is that to get the community involved... is time consuming... you have to make some allowances... the process was not conducive to involving the community. It was too complex, the community could never put this proposal together."

> "...there wasn't enough time to pull them into the process... the government wanted a very technical product... this is not within the parameters of the community reality... this is very much the funders and the institutions dancing..."

> "[The proposal]…attempts to address the community. But I don't think it really did, it just wasn't physically possible ... This is still parachuting a project into a community in that kind of time frame."

A related concern was the perception that the proposal process was very complex and required comprehension of technical information. This opinion was expressed in four site reports and was seen as hindering resident participation. The proposal specifications were considered to be demanding and technical by many of the professionals, and thus, it was suggested that it was necessary to spend more time with residents in order to involve both residents and professionals in the process:

> "…several [interviewees] indicated to us that the lack of time was very short given the work to be accomplished, and it prevented a vast consultation and a large collaboration between the [project members] and the community members."

> "they wanted to give jobs to community [people]… but they didn't realize that [one resident] couldn't read and record…"

> "The complexity of the model and the Ministerial specifications for the proposal were seen as difficult to comprehend and therefore a barrier to resident involvement. It was a conceptual notion and a very complex proposal for the average person and they would find it difficult and even more difficult to make a significant contribution…"

> "…the issue around being involved as a resident was much more difficult for me… years of education helped me to understand what was going on…I eventually figured it out… that might have hindered other people from getting involved... I'm afraid to talk off the top of my head."

Another set of perceived barriers to resident involvement had to do with residents' relationships with professionals and with service agencies. Residents were described as being intimidated and overwhelmed by the professionals participating in the work groups, and in some cases by difficulties in working in English or French. Group structures, procedures, language and values were all seen as reflecting professional customs:

> "…There was also a sense of being intimidated by professionals, and a fear that these professionals would not respect them or their opinions, and would not listen to them…"

> " '…with 20…people in a room, and they are all from agencies and they are introducing one another. And I'm the Assistant Director of this or I am the

> Director here and I am working for the Children's Aid Society and I am the manager of whatever and here you are, and my name is _____. I know it's important that we all know where we're from, but I always feel that must be extremely threatening to that person from the community and who is there because she is Mary Smith…'" (Interviewee)

> "…There were suggestions about non-involvement resulting from the structure and process of the meetings:…the perceived threatening nature of the introductions…kind of language they used, the kind of assumptions that were made…lack of accessibility to meetings for residents [transportation, child care, time of day]…the formality of the meeting structure…"

> "… a lot of the parents were hesitant in coming on board because it seemed so big and overwhelming … and "what are they talking about?"… and they didn't really understand…"

> "That is, parents from ethnic minorities may not speak English or may have been intimidated by working with professionals."

Most meetings included discussion of unfamiliar topics, decision-making procedures, language, and terminology with which residents were not familiar. One site attempted to overcome some of this discomfort by providing coffee and food at meetings, trying to add a less formal dimension.

Another barrier to resident participation was that some residents were distrustful and cynical about service providers. Several site reports mentioned that some residents had negative experiences with professionals in the past. Feelings of cynicism were most graphically described within one site report:

> "X: "Don't you want a program for your baby?"
> "Y: "Where is that f____ program anyway?"

> "'…Some of them have been burned…people become very sceptical… the agency people move on but the people remain…the object has to be that the people are in control, not the agency people…'"

> "'…they were hesitant on coming on board because of all the agency people…there's a lot of distrust with the CAS [Children's Aid Society] and people were very hesitant…very leery…we were also feeling "what if our personal lives are dug into"…so there was a lot of fear…'" (active resident)

> "…One of the persons that I called to interview…she started carrying on about "We don't need another program around here…You're just gonna come in and use us and then leave"…"

Some residents communicated their fear of becoming involved too closely with certain service providers. Three site reports mentioned either the residents' fear of specific services that were involved (e.g., Family & Children's Services), or their concern about jeopardizing existing service delivery to themselves. For example:

> "…there were many suspicions and fears about becoming involved in a project with representatives from agencies, particularly agencies with whom some of them were 'clients'. There was a fear that their involvement might jeopardize the services which they were receiving, and might result in these services being cut off…"

Another barrier to resident participation mentioned was the time chosen to hold meetings. This was questioned in three site reports. One report noted that professionals did not ask residents what time of day would be suitable and convenient for them. Daytime meetings may have been suitable for professionals, but not for residents:

> "…The time that meetings were held (during regular working hours) may have prevented working parents from becoming involved…"

At two sites, the amount of time which residents were requested to contribute was considered by some to be prohibitive and became an issue where the professionals were perceived as being insensitive:

> "Interviewees reported residents perceive that professionals are insensitive in not valuing the residents' time and caregiving work. One professional stressed that service providers should remember that community people's time is also important. Agency people are being paid to attend meetings. Professionals must *value people and value their participation* (italics original)".

> "Most of the participants of (site) are women and single parents and thus had a host of demands and stresses on their time and energy which made it difficult to participate".

Another barrier to resident involvement mentioned in several site reports was the fear on the part of residents that if they participated in the proposal development, they might be at risk of their neighbours' censure. In the words of one site report:

> "…there was also the risk that other neighbours would begin to isolate them because they were acting 'holier than thou', and were collaborating with 'them', that is, those agency people. There was a very real risk that their involvement in

> the proposal would sabotage their relationships within their own neighbourhood, and mark them as being different from others…"

Some site reports commented on the built-in inequality between professionals and resident participants in terms of remuneration for work completed or time spent:

> "…In the very conception of the project and in developing a proposal of this sort, a basic inequality exists in the expectations of paid and unpaid workers… 'Community people (i.e., residents) are expected to work on volunteer time. People are paid to get people to volunteer and call it community development. These people are paid for the time and effort and the others aren't, with all the expectations about empowerment. What it's really doing is loading people with responsibilities' (Interviewee)"

> "As one person said: 'Agency people draw salaries; community do not…' A more substantial difference was that the professionals had more influence on the decision-making and ways of working, than people of lower income and less education."

Other barriers to resident involvement were identified, although less frequently. Class, cultural and language barriers were also mentioned:

> " '…there's no organized group for the Black community so it didn't really have representation …so that was never looked at…and they represent a significant portion of the community…' "

> "… it may simply not have been the custom [of parents from ethnic minorities] to volunteer their time to become involved in community initiatives…"

> "…several interviewees pointed out that residents rearing their children in poverty necessarily focus on crisis management…residents' limited resources result in a need for child care and transportation in order to attend meetings…"

> "… they hadn't even thought of the ethnic makeup, the racial makeup of the community and how they would contact these people."

> "One of the boundaries was geographic. The other boundary that was important was cultural: the communities of diverse languages, races, values, professional backgrounds and accountability, as well as family income."

Because of these obstacles, three site reports indicated that there were some reservations among professionals about encouraging residents to become involved in the project before formal approval of the proposal:

> " '…At that time we realized it didn't make any sense to get people involved [in larger process], just interested in getting their input…we didn't know if it would get funded so we didn't want to raise their hopes…' "
>
> "…Overall there was a 'seesaw' feeling. On one hand, there was commitment to involve the community but also a desire not to raise hopes in case the proposal would not be successful…"

These interviewees suggested that, if their particular proposal was not approved, resident cynicism might increase and deter them from future involvement with community development efforts and service organizations.

Despite these many obstacles to realistic resident participation in proposal development at the sites, there were positive observations about what was accomplished. As was mentioned previously, one site used the Program Development Grant to hire a community developer to form a residents' association to have input on proposal development among other things. This was seen as leading to higher levels of resident influence over proposal development than at the other sites. A second site successfully involved a large number of residents in a needs assessment and proposal development process. In addition, for a number of the residents who were involved in the proposal development process, the experience was described as a positive opportunity to learn. According to one site report:

> "Later on those who were really interested returned and stayed and took more active roles, then they certainly inputted a lot better than they did previously. So there was a sort of acclimatization process there that they went through, what professionals don't need to do because we are so used to things."
>
> "If a lot of people come out to ____ then they'll meet ____ and people find that they're at the same level as they are…like they are not government people or anything, they're people just like us."

SUMMARY

Meaningful local resident participation from the earliest possible point in the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Primary Prevention Project was a priority for the government sponsors. Community involvement was also highly valued by many of the professionals involved in proposal development at each of the seven demonstration sites. All preferred that this principle would be clearly reflected in the initial design of the site program models during proposal

development. Despite these good intentions, and the substantial efforts made at some sites, it is clear that, with the exception of two sites, these sites did not succeed in finding ways to have residents participate in and substantially influence the creation of the early program model plans. Yet it was also evident that this lack of resident involvement was something that many participants regretted. Many had given a good deal of thought to the reasons why they had difficulty fostering local community resident participation in proposal development.

Many more channels existed for getting information about the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project to social service providers than to residents. Social service providers also had a more immediate understanding of how their interests might be affected by the initiative and were motivated to find out more. The sites struggled to find effective ways to let residents know about the project and why participation would be rewarding to them.

Most site reports commented that the timeline of the proposal development process and the perceived content requirements for a successful application made useful resident participation in the process extremely difficult. The relatively short time period available to prepare the proposal (from two to seven months) was seen as prohibitive of allowing the time for a gradual development process that might have permitted meaningful resident participation in program model design. In addition, the content requirements of the proposal were described as very complex and "technical" and much more amenable to contributions of professionals than to those of community residents. There was a general consensus that, if higher levels of resident involvement were to be sought from the beginning, then a slower and more supportive community development process that allowed for active outreach and for educating residents about the project's requirements would be necessary.

The time invested in preparing the proposals was very substantial at most sites. In addition, during peak periods, there were frequent meetings and a lot of work to do. Residents were generally unable to commit this level of time to the project. In addition, at most sites, almost all meetings were scheduled during professional working hours and it was questioned by some whether these times were suitable for resident involvement.

Fears born from negative past experience with agencies, and uneasy relationships between residents and professionals were also seen as dissuading residents from participating in Better

Beginnings, Better Futures. Concerns were voiced about whether residents would be nervous because of the involvement of certain kinds of agencies in the project (for example, child welfare agencies) or the presence of agencies of which they were clients. In addition, the language, procedures, values and often the settings for meetings were all described as reflecting professional preferences. Residents were described as finding these experiences both unfamiliar and intimidating.

At some sites, residents were seen as distrustful and even cynical about the Better Beginnings, Better Futures initiative. This was expressed in statements such as "this is just one more program… we'll still be here after you're gone". This fear made professionals at several sites reluctant to actively involve residents until they were sure that their site would receive funding. Some residents were also described as being vulnerable to intimidation by their neighbours for collaborating with "untrustworthy" professionals or "for not knowing their place".

Overall, these factors contributed to the perception that involving residents in the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Project was a formidable challenge. Nonetheless, there was also a consensus that resident participation was a critically important element in the project and that the involvement of community residents must continue to receive serious attention. However, it was evident that there were many unanswered questions about how to proceed. Active recruiting and shared decision-making with community residents fell outside of the normal frame of reference for many of the professionals who initiated these demonstration projects. There were few, clear roadmaps to follow and little support available to these professionals in their efforts to foster resident involvement in Better Beginnings, Better Futures.

Nonetheless, two sites invested in substantial community development process to reach out to residents and involve them in defining community needs and in making decisions about the proposal. Both of these sites reported much greater levels of success at involving residents from their communities in proposal development. While the barriers described above are substantial, the experience in these two communities shows that they can be overcome.

6. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM MODEL

INTRODUCTION

In the original Request for Proposals (March 1, 1990) for the demonstration project, the government outlined its expectations about age-group focus and program content characteristics for site submissions. It was clear from the site reports that these expectations (both real and perceived) substantially influenced the way that the first program model descriptions at the seven sites were developed. For many, meeting these requirements and balancing them with a locally-driven process was an early source of stress.

There was a good deal of variation in the specific ways each site went about articulating a program model for their proposal. Nonetheless, each was obliged to confront a similar set of tasks and issues in completing it. This section will focus on the process of choosing a cohort group, defining program objectives and program components, and selecting a particular neighbourhood or community location.

SELECTING A FOCAL AGE-GROUP OF CHILDREN

The demonstration project's Terms of Reference required each site to choose either a younger (birth to four years) or older (four to eight years) age-group as a target group for their submission. Five sites chose the birth to four years of age focus and two chose the four to eight years old cohort. Three of the site reports suggested that there was a great deal of discussion and some dissension over which age-group should be chosen. Some disagreements arose because an initial core group had determined the cohort focus prior to the formation of a larger community coalition. In other cases, the difficulties stemmed from a feeling that the age choice was artificial and being imposed by the government:

> "The decision on age-group focus was pre-determined by the initial players. One interviewee stated that from the very beginning they were pointed in the direction of the zero to four age group."

> "…there were some who felt that choosing a specific age as a cutoff was an arbitrary categorization which did not reflect the community's perceived needs.

> Some agency representatives felt that this arbitrary age limit was unrealistic given the overwhelming needs of families…"

At one site in particular, the government officials were described as being influential in the choice of age focus:

> "Another important element is the actual age group toward which the project is directed. In effect, the original proposal foresaw that the project would address infants and young children (0 to 4 years). Afterwards, once the proposal was accepted, the government's authorities suggested that the project should target older children; that is the 4 to 8 year old group. Therefore, the project signatories deferred on this issue and adopted a resolution modifying the project according to the Ministry's suggestion."

At another site, the split among members in choosing an age-group focus caused some to leave the group:

> "[After] the younger age group was chosen, the level of involvement from the (agency) dropped substantially and has not been recaptured to date."

However, at the remaining sites, the choice of age group focus appeared to proceed quite smoothly. A consensus decision-making approach was used. These groups appear to have been comfortable with the age focus and the matter did not appear to have been debated at length.

DETERMINING GOALS/OBJECTIVES AND PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Some informal or formal methods of gathering information about community needs and preferences preceded the definition of program goals/objectives and program content at each site. A few sites used formal needs assessment research and/or available statistics on social indicators and service utilization to inform discussions. Others relied more exclusively on discussions among knowledgeable informants to provide the required information. However, at all sites, there was much discussion and debate, in order to clarify program objectives and to develop program components which would meet those objectives:

> "There is some confusion amongst respondents, then, about how exactly objectives were decided upon. Some described a more intentional process of coming up with the objectives, while others described a less organized development of the objectives. After reading a draft of this report, one person explained that the confusion about how the program objectives were developed resulted from the irregular participation in the Steering Committee by some of the people we interviewed… There was some confusion about who decided upon the program's

> objectives. While two individuals reported that the Steering Committee discussed and decided on the objectives without involving the Coalition, one individual believed that the Steering Committee brought their suggestions back to the Coalition to be decided."
>
> "At the time of the formulation of the project, the choice of goals depended upon the needs defined by the various agencies. (Site) used assessments, as well as statistical data from various levels of government. Our documentation also indicates that the coordinator of the proposal drafting committee met individually with fifteen parents. Finally, the (site) also remained conscious of the directions provided by the government's authorities…"
>
> "As one informant stated, there was a lot of brainstorming through the first three or four meetings and what they thought there should be and then coming down to some refining…and then agreeing to them."
>
> "The objectives of the program arose out of a number of sources. First, the Steering Group started with the three main objectives of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures manual, namely better children, better families, better communities. As well, the Group also had more specific objectives which arose out of the literature search done by one of the representatives into other kinds of prevention projects [not specified]."
>
> "Program objectives… were developed through discussion and brainstorming in planning sessions, through input from the needs assessment, and through the large half-day workshops…From there the information went to the Steering Committee, members of which wrote it into the initial draft. After the initial draft was written, the agencies were invited to review and fine tune it at the third and fourth half-day workshops."

As with the choice of age group, there appeared to be a great deal of discussion and dissension within some of the sites:

> "In the development of the proposal, there was tension between making sure to identify and address the needs expressed by the community and including components recommended by the Ministry. The issue of government defined versus a community defined prevention project continues to be a source of frustration for (site). There was also tension between defining the program model very clearly and maintaining some flexibility. People were concerned that if they defined the program components in detail that there would be little room for community input in the first development year."

> "Although the group generally came to consensus on these issues, one of the individuals interviewed was not impressed with the process of deciding upon program components:
>
> > 'it was a very mushy process of small group discussion… [the components] weren't clear… completely vague... [there was a] purposeful lack of clarity around program components and roles…'".

The procedures used to decide on specific program components and on overall program model varied a great deal across sites. There did not appear to be a common pattern in formulating program approaches and the following quotations have been included to illustrate this diversity:

> "The individual components of the program were developed as a result of the preliminary research conducted by one of the representatives who was freed up from…normal tasks…This framework was presented to the Steering Group and further developed. The individual components [not specified] were expanded and added to by individuals on the Steering Group."
>
> "This proposal included, for each of these sub-groups [0 to 1, 1 to 2, and 2 to 4], activities relating to the four following components: health and nutrition, daycare, activities and leisure, and early detection of problems. The choice of these components followed from the predicted needs of this population…"
>
> "The main program components of this…proposal were parent relief, community visitors, and 'one stop access'. Individuals described the program components as stemming from two different areas: the needs assessment and individuals' own wishes and ideas."

A number of the site reports included concerns that the proposed program components were not clearly enough defined to guide what was to be done. It was not clear that all respondents were confident about how the proposed program components would fit together into an overall program or how goals such as integration and service continuity over time were to be achieved.

CHOOSING A NEIGHBOURHOOD OR COMMUNITY

In reference to location, the Request for Proposals: Research Sites (March, 1990:6) specifically states that the demonstration projects must:

> "have identifiable geographic boundaries of service and be located in a neighbourhood or community which is:
> - very economically disadvantaged.

- very "high risk" for healthy child development.

The minimal definition of community or neighbourhood will focus on shared identification or mutuality within a geographic boundary."

Site reports were fairly consistent about the general ease with which a host community was identified, although not all participants within a project agreed with the specific choice of community:

> "…the discussion about which location to select began as far back as December 1989, when the agencies involved in (community) met. They discussed which communities they would support. At their following meeting… they learned that a representative of the (agency) had already begun organizing with people in the (name) community...Two agencies were noted as refusing to be involved with any initiatives in the (community) area and so dropped their support and involvement."

Government guidelines for the choice of a community had an impact on what locations were chosen. For example:

> "The choice of the community depended, on the one hand, on the statistical studies, the anticipated needs, on the organizations' expertise, and on the other hand, on the parameters that the government's authorities wanted to see respected in the framework of such a project..."

> "Once it was realized that a small neighbourhood study was what the (government's) Technical Advisory Group had in mind, it seems that the neighbourhood was actually chosen by several professionals in the Steering Committee from their knowledge of the community and after discussion had taken place within the planning session. In general, (community) was known as an underserviced area of high risk/high need with a changing multicultural composition...It was a clearly defined area in which individuals would work well together and it produces a yearly cohort of newborns in the target range."

However, one site indicated that choosing the focal community was the hardest decision the group had to make:

> "Nearly all of the people who were interviewed about their involvement in the project remember the experience of deciding which community should be chosen as one of the hardest decisions the group had to make… The process of choosing between the (name) and the (name) communities seemed to be the most difficult for the Steering Group… The Steering Group was aware that any decision would result in disappointment, and would likely result in persons supporting sites leaving the Steering Group if their site was not chosen…After a prolonged and intense discussion, the Steering Group chose the (community) site for a number of reasons. First, the (community) area was easier to define as a geographic economically disadvantaged community… Secondly,…overall the (community) received

> relatively less from the current health and social services network…A final factor was that overall the indicators of economic disadvantage were much more severe and widespread, and affected a greater number of people in (community) …"

SUMMARY

The procedure of soliciting proposals in response to the public Request for Proposals led to more sites focusing on younger children then school-age children. Originally, five sites proposed to focus on the younger age of children and only two on the older group. One site was asked to change its focus from a younger to an older group after the site was selected to participate in the demonstration project.

Choosing an age group of children did not seem to be a difficult decision in most instances. However, the choice did result in some debate and disagreement at one site and part of the original working group left after the decision was made. A more common concern was the perception that the age-group distinctions were artificial and did not accurately reflect community needs or realities.

Formal needs assessments and social indicators were used to help define program objectives and program components at a few sites. All sites sought information from knowledgeable service providers. In all cases, defining program objectives and choosing a program model required many meetings and much discussion. Actual decision-making procedures seemed to vary from a few professionals defining the process to a back-and-forth process between larger and smaller committees with many participants. With the exception of one site where the choice was described as very difficult, the choice of a host community for the demonstration projects did not seem too strenuous.

7. TRENDS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section discusses the implications of the proposal development process for the implementation of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Demonstration Project and the lessons that can be learned for future primary prevention programs. These considerations required a greater degree of interpretation and speculation by the authors than the content in previous sections. The discussion focuses on the limitations of the Request for Proposals format, on structures and collaboration in proposal development, on motivation to participate, on resident involvement, service integration and consensual decision-making, and on the influence of primary prevention values.

In a standard Request for Proposals procedure, terms of reference are prepared and proposals are solicited from interested parties. This is a time-limited endeavour in which predetermined selection criteria are applied to proposals; however, the creation of specific program ideas is in the hands of the external proposal developers. There were some modifications to these basic procedures in Better Beginnings, Better Futures, such as allowing a two-stage proposal screening process and providing proposal development grants to those continuing after the first screening of proposals.

Nonetheless, in Better Beginnings, Better Futures, where there was an interest in demonstrating and understanding the value of particular primary prevention principles and methods, these standard operating procedures revealed some limitations. The limited time available for collaboration in proposal development, the complexity of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Integrated Model for Primary Prevention, and the technical requirements of the proposal all affected proposal development efforts and, from the participants' point of view, the quality of most of the proposals submitted.

Time pressures were felt very strongly at the sites. Concern was expressed regarding the brief time available to complete the proposal and the heavy workloads for active participants at each site. In addition, participants described much effort in trying to understand and to balance the diverse expectations such as resident involvement with service provider integration, local control over the program model with a centrally-defined approach, and creating high-quality

program components with the need for overall service integration. Participants struggled to understand concepts such as service integration and high-quality services. Many were learning about these ideas as they prepared their submissions. Finally, the technical requirements of preparing a proposal (e.g., determining needs, defining objectives, creating a budget) were considered demanding.

Participants described several major consequences of these tensions. Most agreed that adequate levels of resident involvement and real resident influence over proposal development could not be achieved under these conditions. As a consequence, in most settings, community residents were involved marginally in the initial development of the program model. It also was difficult to plan properly. There was confusion about important aspects of the Integrated Model that they were to demonstrate. Not surprisingly, many saw the program models in their proposals as incomplete and lacking clarity in some areas.

Many of the professionals who developed these proposals were confronting new challenges in doing so. They needed time to learn. In hindsight, allowing time for a more careful development process, providing educational opportunities to learn about the central prevention concepts, and giving more support to the technical requirements of proposal development were considered modifications that would have been useful.

There are unresolved issues from the proposal development that might be expected to carry forward to the first stages of project implementation. The struggle to balance local community control and government expectations will continue. Fostering meaningful community resident involvement remains a priority. The concept of integration and its implications are still very unclear for many at the sites. Finally, additional work will be required in order to clarify the primary prevention program models to be demonstrated at each site.

Many different reasons were given for participating in proposal development. Many residents joined in the hope of benefits to themselves and/or their children. Service providers came because of various professional and organizational priorities. Many were inspired by the primary prevention principles in Better Beginnings, Better Futures. The original reasons why people joined in some cases differed from why the government initiated the demonstration project. Time and effort will be required to harmonize these reasons. Similarly, the challenge of meshing

in a positive fashion resident and professional interests will be complex and progress will likely be slow.

With the exception of two sites, local community residents played only a minor role in proposal development. There were many reasons given - for example, the short time available and the amount of work required, the complex nature of the proposal, the intimidating numbers of professionals involved, the everyday barriers in residents' lives, the residents' lack of knowledge, their suspicions about the project as well as their vulnerability to pressure from their peers, the professionals' reluctance to involve residents and their inexperience in doing so. These difficulties could only be partially overcome within the constraints of the proposal development process. However, the success at two sites does suggest that when involving residents was considered a very high priority and pursued vigorously that progress was possible even within these constraints. It also was clear that resident participation and community control remained very important values at each site.

The collaborations between service providers generally were described as positive and unique opportunities. Yet, the proposals did not provide much clarity about how service provider cooperation or integration was to be carried out. At this point in time, there was a good deal of confusion and controversy surrounding the concept of integration for Better Beginnings, Better Futures.[5] This is a concept that will only become clear as the programs evolve.

The organizational structures created at some sites in order to involve large numbers of diverse participants were complex and required much effort to maintain. These organizational demands will increase substantially as the programs become operational. It remains to be seen how the requirements of resident involvement, service provider integration, and internal program adminstration will be balanced. It may take several years before these new organizational structures become stable.

Consensual decision-making was the clear preference at almost every site. In many instances, the attachment to consensual procedures was strong and grounded in participants'

[5]The complexity of the integration concept for the project was increased because for many it extended beyond cooperation among service providers to neighbourhood-agency interactions and also to the sequencing of components with the programs.

values. There were some concerns expressed about the inefficiency of these methods. It will be important to document how these consensual decision-making procedures evolve as the site administrative responsibilities and time pressures increase.

The Better Beginnings, Better Futures Integrated Model for Primary Prevention outlines a general approach to primary prevention in local communities. Everything cannot be planned in advance. Much can only be understood in the doing. Clarification of the program model at each site will take time.

A strong commitment to the idea of primary prevention was expressed in all of the site reports. It was clear that many were inspired by Better Beginnings, Better Futures principles and objectives. These values encouraged people to work very hard and are likely to continue to do so during program implementation. At the same time, these were new ideas to some and much learning will likely be accomplished as the project unfolds.

Although participants thought they could have benefited from having more time to prepare the proposals, more access to education about the Better Beginnings, Better Futures Integrated Model, and more practical assistance in preparing their proposals. The overall message from the Better Beginning Better Futures proposal development process was that participants found the initiative exciting and worthwhile.

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