

## BUILDING SUPPORT

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A broad base of support is usually critical to successful change. Building support requires planning and effort, and it begins with understanding the major participants or stakeholders (Daughtery & Blome, 2009; Fisher, 2009). A systematic effort to identify the major participants begins with understanding each of the systems to be considered. These are discussed in the following sections.

### Task 2: Define Participants

Up to this point in the change process it is not unusual for the people involved to be a small core of committed individuals, possibly even close friends or colleagues, who recognize a condition or problem and are concerned enough to take action. It is appropriate for members of this group to tackle some of the early activities of problem identification and analysis, as long as they avoid becoming prematurely committed to a particular perspective.

In order for effective macro change to occur, it is necessary to have allies. A good deal of strategy development involves building coalitions. People willing to commit themselves to change rarely accept someone else's perspectives on problems and solutions without some negotiation and accommodation. Full participation should be a goal from the outset, even if the initiating group is small. It is often true that the greater the level of participation in the problem identification and analysis phases, the greater the likelihood of consensus on the problem and proposed solution (e.g., Campbell, 2009; Majee & Hoyt, 2009).

It is important that participants critical to the success of the change effort be identified in a systematic manner. One risk is that group members may assume that they represent a full range of perspectives and fail to identify everyone who needs to be included. If participation is to be representative of a wide variety of groups and interests, change agents need to understand all of the systems involved. Careful attention should be paid to insuring that a wide variety of perspectives is included throughout the process. This would include all relevant ethnic groups, women, and any other populations that are considered relevant to the change effort. A number of such systems will play critical roles in determining success or failure of the proposed change,

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so representatives from these systems should be selected carefully and invited to participate in designing the change or intervention.

We will use the term *system* to describe these critical participants. This term is used in the context of *systems theory*, implying that participants should be viewed as more than simply a collection of individuals with common interests and characteristics. As a system or subsystem critical to the success of the change effort, they represent a complex set of interrelationships having system-like attributes that must be recognized and attended to by the core planning group. One of these attributes, for example, is *entropy*, which refers to the natural tendency of systems to expire without input and regeneration from outside the system. The concept is directly applicable to the types of systems involved in planned change.

Given the community and organizational arenas in which change occurs, it is important to emphasize how diverse the identification of participants can be. For example, in a human service agency that has identified an unskilled and potentially insensitive staff who are unprepared to work effectively with immigrant families, it will be necessary to include persons with knowledge about immigration issues and skills in the planned change design. Although this could be initially viewed as an internal agency problem, staff members will want to include participants beyond agency walls, such as immigrants and others with expertise in this area. Another example is a grassroots community change effort in which multiple domestic violence shelters have been identified as unprepared to deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered clients (Crisp, 2006). In this community, participants would include representatives from multiple organizations that house shelter programs as well as interested constituencies who have an interest in solving this problem. Defining participants for both these change opportunities requires capturing persons and groups, some of whom are immediately obvious and others that may be newly identified but helpful to the change process.

The systems to be considered include the (1) initiator system, (2) change agent system, (3) client system, (4) support system, (5) controlling system, (6) host and implementing systems, (7) target system, and (8) action system. It should be noted that these terms are used here solely for conceptual purposes to assist in understanding who should be involved and why. They are not commonly used among people involved in change efforts. It is more likely that terms such as *agency*, *office holder*, *position*, *committee*, and *task force* will be used to designate individuals and groups, but the professional who coordinates the effort should be aware, conceptually, of which systems need to be represented and why.

### **Identify the Initiator System**

The key questions to be explored are:

- ‡ Who first recognized the problem and brought attention to it?
- ‡ How should/can the initiators be involved in the change effort?

The initiator system is made up of those individuals who first recognize the existence of a problem and call attention to it. Note that many people inside or outside a system may see a problem that needs to be addressed, yet nothing is ever done. An individual or members of a group do not become an initiator system until they begin taking steps to bring about a change. For example, a group of citizens recognized high rates of HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy in their south Florida community and decided to take action

### **Box 9.1 Potential Members of an Initiator System in a Community Effort to Promote Safe Sex Practices**

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| ‡ Concerned citizens committed to change | ‡ Planned parenthood staff   |
| ‡ Community leaders                      | ‡ County health staff  |
| ‡ Victims of HIV/AIDS                    | ‡ Other interested and committed community representatives, insuring that all relevant ethnic groups and other special populations are represented |
| ‡ Parents                                |  |
| ‡ High school counselors                 |  |

(Weiss, Dwonch-Schoen, Howard-Barr, & Panella, 2010). They initiated a participatory action project that was highly successful in achieving its goals. Using this project as an example, a list of potential initiators in such a community action project might include those identified in Box 9.1.

Individuals who first raise an issue may or may not also become a part of the initial planning process. If possible, key roles in the change effort should be assigned to initiators. Having already demonstrated an interest in the issue, they may be in a position to bring other supporters along. This becomes especially important if the initiators are indigenous to the community (Meyer & Hyde, 2004). People who have lived with the problem or need are likely to be knowledgeable about the problem but may see themselves as powerless to affect the system. Empowerment strategies such as teaching, training, group counseling, or consciousness-raising efforts can pay rich dividends in the long run and can place appropriate spokespersons in leadership positions (e.g., Everett, Homstead & Drisko, 2007). In any case, it is important for change agents to be aware of the person or persons who first raised the issue and to keep in close contact as the problem or need is framed for public consumption.

#### **Identify the Change Agent System**

The key question to be explored for this activity is:

- ‡ Who will be responsible for leadership and coordination in the early stages of the change effort?

For a professionally assisted change effort to be successful, there must be one or more individuals designated as coordinator or coordinators of the change effort. We will refer to this person or persons as the *change agent*. The change agent, together with an initial core planning committee or task force, comprise the change agent system.

If the change activity will require drawing on the resources of an organization, it is essential that the organization sanction the change and also be identified as part of the change agent system. This may involve getting formal approval from the executive or the board and may require release time from other duties, secretarial support, use of copying machine, mailing privileges, and other such resources. Depending on the scope of the change, support may require written approval to insure that all contingencies are covered or simply an agreement among supervisor and colleagues that certain staff will be devoting some of their time to the project.

In community change efforts, approvals may be less formal than in organizational settings. For example, a grassroots organizing effort may be comprised of citizen-volunteers who are neighborhood residents but are not tied to formal

organizational settings. The grassroots group may be loosely structured, not having executive committees and perhaps not having many resources. General agreement among the members of the group may be the full extent of sanctioning in this arena (Rogge, Davis, Maddox, & Jackson, 2005).

The change agent system serves as a sort of steering committee to guide the change effort in its early stages. The makeup of this system is critical to the change effort because much of what is accomplished will be framed in the perspectives of these individuals. Ideally, this system will include representation from the initiator system—people who have experienced the identified problem, people who have had experience in trying to solve the problem, and people who can be influential in getting the change accepted. Again, representation is important.

The function of the change agent system is to act as an initial coordinating or steering committee until a wider range of participants can be incorporated into the change effort. Many participants in the change effort will be taking on different activities at the same time. It is the job of the change agent system to ensure that the change effort is properly organized and carried out from its early conceptualization to the point it is turned over to others for implementation. As the major systems and perspectives are identified and the action system (discussed later in this chapter) is formed, the coordinating functions are shifted to the action system.

The work of the change agent system begins with coordinating and carrying out the problem, population, and arena analyses, as described in Chapters 3 through 8. This may involve setting up project teams, doing research, interviewing, and coordinating all of the study effort through a steering committee. Then there is the work of agreeing on a general strategy. As new participants are added, responsibilities are assigned until the analytical work is complete and a strategy is developed for getting the change accepted and implemented. Examples of people who might serve as part of the change agent system are included in Box 9.2.

### Identify the Client System

The key questions to be explored for this activity are:

- ‡ Who will be the primary beneficiaries of change?
- ‡ Who will be the secondary beneficiaries of change?

The client system is made up of individuals who will become either direct or indirect beneficiaries of the change if it is implemented (Linhorst,

#### **Box 9.2 Potential Members of the Change Agent System in a Community Effort to Promote Safe Sex Practices**

‡ Chair	A county staff person with good organizational skills
‡ Teens (2)	Knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS with time available to devote to the project
‡ Concerned citizens	Well known in the community; who can get others to support the effort
‡ County Board Member	Someone who can run interference and get the county to support the effort

‡ Other interested and committed community representatives