



TRAINING THE TRAINER ON POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

A Developmental Evaluation Report

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This developmental evaluation (DE) was developed as part of the University of Colorado's Community Organizing for Prevention (COFP) evaluation plan. This evaluation was collaboratively guided by the following partners:

- Kit Jones, Injury and Violence Prevention Center at Colorado School of Public Health
- Steering Committee Members - The CU Evaluation Team sought out and consulted with both subject and process matter experts in local policy and systems change:
 - Dr. Doreen E. Martinez, Colorado State University
 - Kale McMonagle, The Civic Canopy
 - Jenna Metzinger, Colorado School of Public Health
 - Marc Morgan, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
 - Melissa Pluss

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) Community Organizing for Prevention (COFP) program commissioned the University of Colorado's (CU) COFP evaluation team to describe core competencies and best practices for building capacity of trainers or coaches who work with community partners interested in implementing equitable and culturally responsive changes in policies or systems at the neighborhood, city, and county level. We employed the use of a developmental evaluation (DE) in order to assess and provide recommendations for the development of these core competencies and best practices.

To assist in the DE process, the CU COFP evaluation team activated a steering committee of both process and subject matter experts who work with community partners to implement policy and systems change strategies at the local level. Together, they designed interviews to collect data from trainers and practitioners working on local policy and systems change, then guided the analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

This report highlights important conceptual findings from the DE. These findings can be used:

- To build skill, knowledge and understanding of trainers and coaches who support communities that are implementing policy and/or systems change at the neighborhood/city/county level
- To strengthen a community's system of support by identifying when it might be appropriate or necessary to pull in additional supports beyond the initially identified trainer
- To inform future projects focusing on skill development pertaining to the core competencies detailed in this report, and/or future DEs focusing on how to evaluate the impact, results, or outcomes with what success looks like regarding training a community around local policy and systems change

We also identified overarching themes that captured the foundations on which we believe these core components and best practices are based. These **guiding principles** can be used to ensure individuals who use the findings of this report have a base knowledge of policy and systems change, are committed to coaching towards these changes in local communities and are ready to dig in more to the full DE findings.

Guiding Principles at a Glance:

- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1: Policy and systems change are very interconnected.** By changing policy, one is changing the system(s) around them. However, one can do systems change work and never involve policy change. Policy change is a piece of systems change, as there are many other conditions of systems change (See Fig. 1).

- » **COACHING RECOMMENDATION:**
 - Coaches must understand how policy and systems change are interconnected. It is important that a coach can explain this to the communities they are working with.

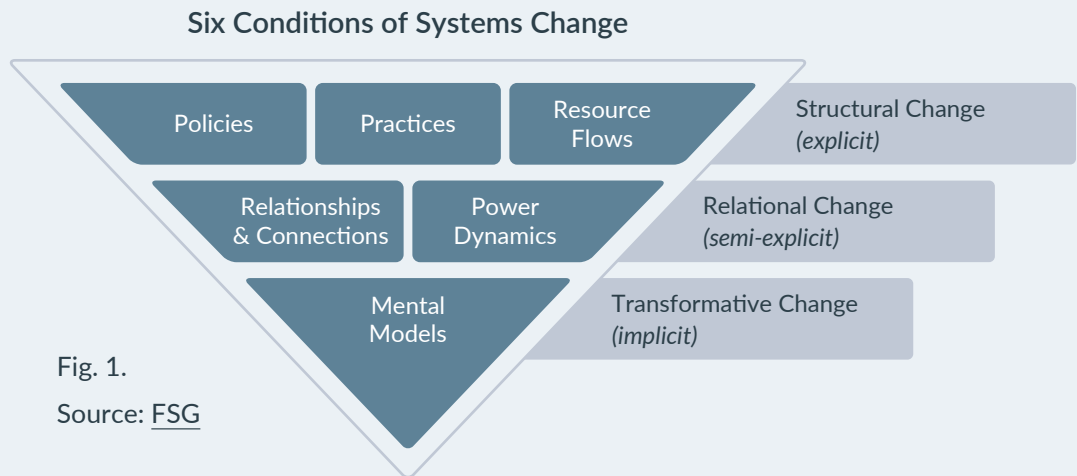


Fig. 1.
Source: [FSG](#)

- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #2: Coaching towards policy and systems change requires a team approach.** There is so much that goes into training a community around policy and systems change at the local level. These concepts are very expansive and multi-faceted.
- » **COACHING RECOMMENDATION:**
 - A coach needs to know their own strengths and limitations. A level of awareness needs to be present that allows a coach to know when it is appropriate to pull another subject matter expert (SME) in to support the work being done with the local organizer. To be considered an “expert” in every core component and best practice is not realistic for any one coach.
- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #3: There is potential for harm.** There is a possibility that harm can be caused or furthered by upholding oppressive systems and practices towards particular individuals and groups in a community through policy and systems change work.
- » **COACHING RECOMMENDATION:**
 - The use of an equity lens while coaching is key to preventing further harm and oppression within the community.

- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #4: Policy and systems change are not linear processes.** Oftentimes, the work can experience setbacks, challenges, or unanticipated events that require those doing the work to shift their plans and create new ways forward to reach the end goal. Small but important “wins” occur throughout the policy and systems change process and can occur even if the originally planned policy or systems change never occurs. Identifying and celebrating these can help keep momentum and sustained engagement of those involved in the process.
- » **COACHING RECOMMENDATION:**
 - A coach needs to assist local organizers in thinking broadly about what “success” means in connection to the initiative. When working with a community, coaches need to provide support around continuous evaluation of the local efforts to ensure that their efforts remain on-track and are appropriate for any unforeseen changes or barriers that have the potential to derail any original plan of action.

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- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #5: Policy and systems change can be a slow and challenging process.** This process is natural, and expectations need to be clear and understood by all parties who are involved in the policy and systems change process.

» COACHING RECOMMENDATION:

- A coach needs to be prepared to support a community in how to anticipate and deal with frustration and disappointment that can naturally occur throughout the broader policy and systems change process. Coaches must be prepared to support communities in managing conflict and burnout.

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- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #6: Place-based context is essential.** Policy and systems change at the local level requires a basic level of understanding about the social, political, and economic dynamics and community conditions in each community.

» COACHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is essential that coaches spend time visiting the community to learn more about the individuals and context that make up that community, grounding themselves in understanding the various dynamics and conditions in each community.
- Before training a community, a coach should examine how the social issue is currently framed within that community. This also includes having a basic understanding of the community's demographic information, who holds power within that community, and what resources are available to that community.
- It is important to spend time coaching a community around getting to know the decision-making structures and processes of their local government and/or school board, and diving deeper into who holds power within those structures.

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- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #7: Importance of community as partners.** It is imperative that policy and systems change work be done alongside those who live and work within the community of focus.

» COACHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Coaches need to train communities why it is important to engage community members in local policy and systems change, and help communities identify ways in which this can be done continuously throughout the process (e.g. when collecting and interpreting local data, during the power mapping process, when identifying possible policy or systems change solutions, evaluation and monitoring, etc.)

- Coaches need to advocate for those leading local policy and systems change work to be inclusive of the different demographic identities which are present in that specific community.

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- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #8: Relationships are key.**

Much of the work involved in local policy and systems change is contingent on the existence of trusting relationships between those who are involved in each step of the process.

» COACHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Building a relationship where the coach and community can be honest, critical, and transparent with one another will help create an environment that will allow for crucial conversations.
- A coach needs to spend time working with the local trainer on emotional intelligence and self-awareness skill development. Emotionally intelligent trainers can effectively facilitate change and manage the emotions involved within the change process, as change can trigger strong emotions for those who are required to change. Part of this must also include skill building around motivating for change, conflict management, and equitable decision-making processes.
- Coaching towards authentic community engagement is key to ensuring relationships are built out of respect and care and are not exploitative or tokenizing.

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- **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #9: “Talking into people’s listening ears” is essential.** Knowing how to talk about the work in a multitude of ways allows for the engagement of diverse members of the community and helps to obtain buy-in from those with decision-making power.

» COACHING RECOMMENDATION:

- Learning how to message to a variety of audiences from the start is important to the sustainability and success of local efforts. Values-based coaching techniques, storytelling, public narrative building, and developing media strategies are all skills that need to be used when training local communities in policy and systems change.

For more information, feel free to read the full report.