

MINI-GRANTS:

A Community Approach to AOD Prevention

Introduction

Whatever approach one takes to AOD prevention, one thing is certain - interventions cost money. Whether it's for staffing, or renting a room to produce AOD-free events, or buying billboard space to raise community awareness about binge drinking, AOD prevention programs require operating budgets.

One often overlooked funding source for AOD prevention is mini-grants. These are small grants made to community organizations to implement specific AOD prevention activities. The money to fund a mini-grant program may come from many sources -county general funds, the federal government, local AOD program administrators, the National Tobacco Settlement, private fundraising or large foundations. Generally, an intermediate agency first applies for the funds and then re-distributes them locally as mini-grants.

Mini-grant programs have many advantages. First, the small, usually grassroots organizations that apply for them have better access to at-risk populations than the intermediate agencies that fund them. This allows more members of targeted populations to access AOD prevention services. Second, since the programs are designed by the agencies receiving the funding, the actual prevention

By Charlie Seltzer

interventions are tailor-made to the unique needs of the populations served. Third, AOD prevention can wind up spreading beyond the usual providers to include non-traditional providers as well. We know, for example, that alternative activities (activities that promote resiliency and skill development) combined with interactive



education can make for effective AOD prevention . So, the YMCA that offers swimming classes can be seen as an AOD prevention provider. So, too, can the private school that offers music lessons and the local horticultural society that offers gardening classes. This allows more providers to do AOD prevention work, which in turn creates greater buy-in at the local level and helps AOD prevention permeate a community.

prevention *Tactics* 8:6 (2005)

Tactics (tak´tik) n. **1.** a plan for promoting a desired end. **2.** the art of the possible.

How big is a mini-grant?

Some funders may want to offer a one-size grant. Funding instructions, for example, may instruct applicants to apply for up to \$7,500. Other funders may find it advantageous to offer several sizes of grants, each targeting a different kind of prevention activity or aimed at agencies at different stages of development. A mini-grant program might actually have several tiers, offering small, medium and large size options.

A small mini-grant might be perfect for less organized groups that typically don't apply for funding despite needing money to implement their prevention activities. Such groups often don't have the staff or the know-how to apply for a grant, or may think that applying for a grant is simply too "mainstream." To encourage broader participation and to encourage shorter, faster turn-around projects, a small mini-grant application might consist of a one-page narrative, a one-page budget for a maximum of (say) \$1,000, and a one-page final report. Logic models and evaluation plans may be totally absent. Actual examples of small mini-grant funded programs include: \$800 to a local church to pay an off-duty police officer to teach a course in AOD awareness to community members; \$1,000 to a County Office of Education to provide stipends to at-risk youth to attend substance-free activities; and \$400 to a local theater company for stipends for youth to participate in an AOD-free, summer production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Thanks to your funding, the presence of drugs in our community is lessening. Socially outcast student addicts are being recognized as heroes for speaking out.

—A community member addressing the impact of mini-grant funding

Medium mini-grants are typically made to agencies that want to accomplish a "special project" - for example, to develop a new prevention program or apply an established prevention program to a new population. Like the small mini-grant, the medium mini-grant is competitive and open to all AOD prevention providers, including non-traditional ones. The application tends to be more rigorous than the small mini-grant's, requiring the applicant to utilize proven prevention strategies, employ a logic model, have both an evaluation plan and a detailed budget and to provide interim and final reports.

Three examples of medium mini-grants follow. The first was a \$10,000 grant made to a local high school that allowed students and adult volunteers to complete a student-led film on methamphetamine use. Once the film was finished, it was shown in schools across the county. Discussions at each showing encouraged student-to-student dialog on the effects of the drug and the community's mobilization to discourage its sale and use. In addition, 250 copies of the film were distributed around the county. A second example: \$10,000 was awarded to train 60 youth as peer mentors who then served as role models at their high schools and as group leaders at three ensuing Challenge Days. Each Challenge Day recruited up to 100 at-risk youth and 30 adult volunteers with the aim of building youth resiliency through educational exercises. And finally: \$10,000 was granted to a local adult school to produce a documentary on the making of a cookbook that 75 Latina women collectively authored the previous year. The project enhanced the women's self esteem; developed their leadership, personal and

job skills; improved intercultural exchange, strengthened community networks, and increased English language acquisition. These assets were then passed on to family members as the women served as family leaders and role models.

At a local meeting about meth use in our community, the project you funded was recognized as the single most effective intervention in our two-year anti-meth campaign.

—Staff member of a mini-grant funded
“No Meth” program.

A large mini-grant might be perfect for more well-established organizations that want funding to provide not only prevention services, but also to improve their *capacity* to provide prevention services. Most funders reserve so-called “capacity building” grants for organizations with which they have an established relationship, meaning that they typically *invite* selected organizations to apply rather than issuing an RFP that's open to all. While the term *capacity building* has been around for a long time, many people are still unclear what it actually means. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, for example, defines capacity building grants as those that “develop or refine skills, strategies, organizational systems and structures.” The Wilburforce Foundation (which assists non-profits in the Pacific Northwest) describes capacity building grants as “strategic investments in your organization that increase its sustainability and effectiveness, including, but not limited to: strategic planning and evaluation; resource development, such as revenue diversification and major donor campaigns; membership development, such as recruitment and retention; technology improvements, such as computer and software upgrades, Internet advocacy, or new equipment; and board and staff development,

such as training, workshops or conferences.” And finally, in “Strengthening Nonprofit Performance: A Funder's Guide to Capacity Building,” authors Paul Connolly and Carol Lukas define capacity building as “the process of strengthening an organization in order to improve its performance and impact.”

An organization's capacity consists of many interdependent elements. Among them are (1) its mission, values and vision; (2) its leadership and governance structures; (3) its programs - what they are, how they are delivered, and what impact those programs have on people; (4) its relations with key community partners; (5) its funding; and finally, (6) its internal operations and management systems. Typically, in a capacity building grant application, funders want answered some version of the question: “How will this money help your organization improve its capacity to deliver AOD prevention services?” Detailed logic models, evaluation plans and a budget are typical components of capacity building grants. One example of a capacity building grant was an award made to a private, performing arts school that provided AOD prevention services. \$14,000 was awarded to research ways to bring in non-tuition income, to conduct resource development training for its Board of Directors, and to begin a capital fund-raising campaign. The school's capital campaign was so successful that today it is buying its own building and converting it into a fully equipped theater - complete with stage, lights, sound, dressing rooms, rehearsal rooms, and lots of parking. These changes - a new building, better facilities, increased funding and a better trained Board - have allowed the school to increase its *capacity* to provide AOD prevention services.

On behalf of all the students and myself I want to express our gratitude for all this grant makes possible. The major lifestyle and attitude changes made by these young members of our community will not only prepare them to make healthy and productive contributions as adults, but will help raise the standards of other students and the entire community as well.

—Project director of a mini-grant funded program.

Another example of a large mini-grant is a \$14,000 award made to an agency to hire a consultant who then developed the agency's strategic plan. With a well-crafted strategic plan in hand, the agency applied for, and received, a multi-year, \$500,000 Cowell Foundation grant with which they hired an executive director, program manager, business manager and activities coordinator. The \$14,000 large mini-grant allowed them to not just deliver AOD prevention services, but to expand their *capacity* to deliver these services. Today the agency has the organizational infrastructure to apply for and regularly receive large foundation and government grants.

Capacity building can be likened to a funder's *investment* in a non-profit organization. In the above example, a \$14,000 investment produced a \$500,000 "return" that allowed the recipient organization to grow not just its programs but its management, leadership and ability to bring in even more program dollars.

Training the grant writers

Many of the agencies that apply for mini-grants tend to be small, grassroots organizations. As such, many lack the technical know-how to apply for a grant or to understand what makes a grant proposal fundable. Many have never had to deal with logic models, evaluation plans or evidence-based prevention strategies. Many have never had to write interim or final reports, craft a

budget, or compare what they said they were going to do with what actually happened. As part of their mini-grant programs, funders might therefore want to offer grant writing training. Content could include a definition of "prevention;" an explanation of the funder's priorities; examples of effective programs, proven prevention strategies and previously funded programs; definitions and examples of logic models, evaluation plans and budgets; and an explanation of how grant applications are scored.

Communities that offer grant writing workshops as part of their mini-grant programs generally find that the quality of grant writing improves over the years. As time goes by, more and more agencies are able to write better and better grants. As a result, more AOD prevention dollars flow into a community. A good mini-grant program that includes training in grant writing can incubate start-up organizations and grow them into more effective AOD prevention providers.

"Just say no" or "Dare to be different" don't work very well. What youth need to learn is that they won't be able to live their dreams and aspirations if they are messed up on drugs. Our son learned that if he wanted to do a black-flip safely, he needed to be physically and mentally healthy - not hung over or spacey.

—Parent of a 14 year old enrolled in a mini-grant funded gymnastics class.

Where to go from here

The Community Prevention Institute (CPI) offers a one-day training in how to establish a mini-grant program in your own community. The training, *Mini-grants - A Community Approach to AOD Prevention*, provides an overview of the community grant making process - what it is and how to fund it. It also discusses effective programs, evidence based prevention strategies, and gives detailed explanations and examples of small, medium and large sized mini-grants. Additionally, the training includes information on how to train grant readers and how to evaluate the effectiveness of a community based mini-grant program, as well as sample forms to use for many different kinds of mini-grants. For more information about *Mini-grants - A Community Approach to AOD Prevention*, please contact CPI at 916-983-8929 or view the web site at <http://www.ca-cpi.org/>. The web site also hosts all of the Prevention Tactics in this series.

The Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) has a mini-grant program operated by and for youth. YLI and its Youth Philanthropy program can be contacted at www.yli.org.

Several foster youth came up to the Director and hugged her while saying this was the best camp experience they ever had. At least three foster youth asked if they could be youth mentors in the next camp. There were tears on the departure day by both mentors and foster youth alike. We couldn't have done it without your funding.

—Staff member of a mini-grant funded foster youth/youth mentor program.

For those who want more information on how to write a grant, a simple web search for grant writing will yield plenty of training material. Here are just three of the many resources available.

- (1) Non-Profit Guides offers free web-based grant-writing tools at <http://www.npguides.org/>.
- (2) The Environmental Protection Agency offers an excellent grant writing tutorial (useful for any kind of grant, not just EPA grants) at

<http://www.epa.gov/seahome/grants/src/msieopen.htm>.

- (3) Finally, the Foundation Center has a Proposal Writing Short Course available at <http://fdncenter.org/learn/short-course/prop1.html>.



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prevention Tactics is published periodically by CARS under its Community Prevention Institute contract with the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (DADP). The purpose of this publication is to help practitioners in the prevention field stay abreast of best practices emerging from current research and to provide practical tools and resources for implementing proven strategies.

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Edition 8:6

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