Attachment ll

Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant

Final Report

Over the past four years Merced County Mental Health Department (MCMH) has partnered with local groups and organizations to implement the SPF SIG in the City of Merced. MCMH has served as the grantee for SPF SIG providing contractors with assistance and oversight during the project. MCMH provided one part time Project Coordinator to work with contracting parties in planning and facilitating enforcement and visibility efforts. The Project Director provided budgets and implementation plans for the contractor(s) and Police Departments working on the grant. The Project Director also served as the visibility coordinator towards the end of the grant as the original contractor did not provide the effort needed to get the visibility efforts up and running.

The role of the subcontractor was initially to provide visibility coordination and oversight of enforcement activities however the visibility was never produced and thus the role was taken over by the MCMH Project Coordinator. However, the contractor did provide some oversight for enforcement operations, meeting each month to review after action reports submitted by the police department(s). MCMH was told by DHCS that our department could not fund the police department directly which made the oversight, funding, and reimbursement process extremely difficult. Because of this restraint MCMH had to fund a local community (United Way of Merced County) who then reimbursed the local police department for any enforcement operations that took place. Implementation of Police activities were also very difficult given the dosage requirements set forth by PRC. The City of Merced is a medium sized community with limited police officers so the overtime needed for many of the operations was just not available most of the time. The police department did agree to a number of activities and those were mapped out on yearly work plans by both the Project Director and the Police Department (Captain and Lieutenants). However each quarter the Project Director would attempt to make contact with the Police Departments identified officer for the project but to no avail and minimal if any services were implemented by the police. With little to no community driven support or involvement in the oversight of the grant it became very frustrating attempting to hold the police department accountable for their inactivity. Meetings were requested with Police Department Administration and PRC but these meetings did not correct the problem of inactivity. Even when enforcement actually took place very few citations were given, specifically for social host violations. Another shortfall was the reporting of the enforcement activities. Several meetings were held to ensure login information and procedures were understood for the reporting of activities in the PRC database. But again, these meetings produced no change in behavior with the local police department. It has seemed from the beginning that there has been a lack of interest in the issue of underage and excessive drinking among local law enforcement, in comparison to other crimes.

PRC has been very supportive from the beginning providing guidance on partnership development and establishing roles among partners to online webinars providing information on the enforcement and visibility activities that were expected to be implemented. Their staff were always reaching out to the Project Director to see what they could do to help with the lack of enforcement. But again, no matter what communication was made with the police department there was ultimately very little enforcement carried out.

Looking back over the course of the project is disheartening. There were thousands of dollars untouched by enforcement and visibility efforts. There are a few changes I would recommend. First, DHCS should be more prepared to provide concrete processes and objectives to the grantees. Over the past four years there have been numerous changes to what was allowed and what was not allowed as far as contracting, strategies, and timelines. In smaller communities with low levels of civic engagement it was very difficult to find a nonprofit or 501C3 that wanted to lead this effort with such little funding available for the actual administration of the grant (10%). Also, we were initially told that we, the grantee, could not directly fund the police department and that caused a lot of confusion and wasted a lot of money by having to use the local United Way as the actual contractor instead of being able to contract directly with the police department. It became almost impossible to hold them accountable for the lack of activity. No contract equated to no leverage. However, while at some of the learning forums (with other funded communities present) I learned that other grantees were told they could indeed fund the police department directly. This again caused confusion because it seemed as though DHCS was guiding us through this process without having an actual idea of how effective the initial model would be in the funded communities and thus exceptions were made on a case by case basis without consistency across the grantee communities. Overall it seemed as though everyone involved including DHCS, we the grantee, PRC, and the local contractors were ultimately all learning as we went along which really stymied any local interest here.

The planning for this grant was really provided for us. Once we received notification of the grant award we were invited to an initial learning community. At this forum we received documentation and information on the types of strategies that were to be used, the number of each strategy to be done over each year, and discussed possible roadblocks to the implementation. For agencies that already had a working relationship with their police department it seemed that the logic models provided by the state worked well. But for agencies, such as ours, that did not have an ongoing high functioning relationship with the local police department the strategies were hard to initiate. The local grantee, contractor and police department did meet yearly to layout work plans which detailed timelines and finances available for each strategy. Although this seemed to be fairly easy and when in each other's company the plans were agreed to, there was ultimately very little carried out by the contractor and police department.

The SPF SIG project may have demonstrated that enforcement of ordinance and policy is of little importance for lower socioeconomic communities where crime is higher and the rate of crime is much higher than more affluent communities. Local law enforcement was swamped with murders, assaults, and robberies and was reportedly hard pressed to find officers that were available to work additional overtime to participate in the SPF SIG operations. Therefore there was little buy in overall from the Police Department. Everything was agreed upon in meetings but when it came down to the actual enforcement, little was carried out. Hence the logic model was a good tool to explain the reasoning behind the strategies to be used but it did not provide adequate evidence that underage and excessive drinking should be a priority for law enforcement.

Visibility was also difficult to implement in our community for two reasons. One, there are very few mediums available to provide any high profile coverage of the enforcement that was planned. And two, even when visibility was produced there was hardly ever a corresponding enforcement operation carried out making the visibility seem random and uncoordinated. There are a couple of local radio stations that were identified which were used to highlight the enforcement although the station that was used carried a very small number of listeners. There was also an attempt to highlight enforcement through the local movie theaters which had the potential of hitting many viewers. However, local PSA's are only played before the major previews which means the actual number of viewers was a fraction of the number who attended the movie because of how far ahead the PSA was played ahead of the main event. Probably the most successful visibility effort was the Recognition and Reminder project. This project was carried out once each quarter to highlight the minor decoy operations that were to be carried out. However as mentioned previously, the visibility efforts rarely corresponded with actual enforcement taking place which made it less impactful anticipated. This was however a great strategy to get the community engaged. There was also a Facebook page (SPARE Merced) which posted the enforcement operation outcomes as well as highlighted newspaper articles regarding alcohol consumption.

It is currently unclear as to what evaluation will be done by the PRC in regards to the SPF SIG project so how the results will be used cannot be determined at this time. However the first hand experience of attempting to utilize law enforcement in the prevention of alcohol and drugs in the City of Merced has proven to be troublesome. After four years of efforts to meet with officers, sergeants, lieutenants and eventually captains it is obvious that the police department has either no capacity (which may include staff or time) or interest in working towards the reduction of alcohol related problems in Merced. Visibility of enforcement is only effective if the actual enforcement follows so it is also understood that at this time the investment of staff and or money in promoting enforcement of underage and excessive drinking would not be worthwhile.

Prevention providers looking to implement this project should be sure to develop a relationship with the Chief of Police to ensure accountability from the top level of the police department. Funding the police department directly would help to ensure a direct relation through contractual agreements that could then be referred to if work was not being performed as outlined. We would also advise to build a relationship with the local news outlets so that there is support for the visibility of any enforcement that does takes place. If relations with the news outlets and the law enforcement administration are not currently established then it would be recommended to fund a community based organization that would have less political fallout or restraint for holding the police department accountable in public forums or settings for anything less than desirable performance. If environmental prevention is to be the focus of a project then it will need to have the actual participatory support of local law enforcement, media outlets, and a community coalition.

Merced County Department of Mental Health is in the process of developing their Strategic Prevention Framework and so determining which activities from the SPF SIG project will continue would be premature at this time. However in the retail arena there was an obvious interest in helping to reduce underage and excessive drinking as many vendors expressed problems they themselves have experienced because of these norms. Therefore building relations with the retail environment will be a focus of the County's work in the future. There is also as obvious need to develop a community coalition(s) or at least a community level interest to assist in underage and excessive drinking efforts. Community involvement in prevention will be an underlying theme as well in the work of Merced County Department of Mental Health moving forward.

The opportunity for participating in the strategic prevention framework state incentive grant has given the Department of Mental Health some great insight into the possibilities of environmental prevention through partnership with law enforcement. It has also provided an opportunity to look at the capacity needed to perform these strategies such as funding, time, and relationships. If nothing else this grant has provided us the opportunity to see that these efforts can work here as they have in other communities but that it is essential to have full commitment from all parties involved.