

Schuylkill County's VISION, Schuylkill County, PA

Schuylkill County's VISION mobilizes community resources to help create a better future for Schuylkill County. Schuylkill County's VISION has been serving the people of Schuylkill County since 1998. VISION's mission is to mobilize community resources to help create a better present and future for Schuylkill County. VISION is involved with hundreds of county residents in projects that make differences in their lives. VISION does this through acting as an intermediary and building effective collaborations with their strategic partners and other community partners that take on some of the big issues in the county.



Model Practice in Action

Align for a Stronger Response

For years, those involved in public health in Schuylkill County had wanted to expand immunizations in the county. The opportunity came in 2010 when the Interfaith Health Network, Schuylkill County's VISION, Diakon Community Services, the county PA DOH clinic, and the local Emergency Management Agency came together to begin a partnership to address flu immunizations for those

in most need in the county. Through a grant, Emory's IHP was providing guidance and some funding and the PA DoH later provided some education monies and free flu vaccines to VISION and Diakon Community Services. All of these entities came together to maximize their reach. They marketed the free clinics together and shared the resources. They utilized some congregations as sites in the county, especially where there is high need and geographic isolation. Each year, they have become more effective and efficient. They brought other partners on board and established an Immunization Coalition for the county. That Coalition has had small grants to increase educational outreach.

Over the last four years, this program has evolved and responded to different emergent needs of the community. The distinctive strength by the coalition members shared is a focus on what will serve the county's people most effectively in the short term and the long term. That focus drives the core partnerships and those who have joined the Immunization Coalition. They support each other as professionals and friends who have worked hard together to accomplish something much larger than themselves. The selection of core partners who are positive, flexible, and creative people is one key to success.



What Does it Take?

The following shows how one recognizes and builds this success, how Schuylkill County's VISION accomplished this success, and guiding principles for accomplishing success.

- Establish relationships before you need them, ones based on the needs of people, not needs of agencies
- Consider and assess your current trusted partnerships
- Create a space where those who are committed to serve can serve collectively
- Define population's needs (community immunizations were done based on geographical or population need)
- Establish respect for each other by allowing partners to explain where their passion and mission came from, specifically their faith-based passion and mission. Understanding = appreciation = respect
- Articulation of commitment; ongoing communication (not always formal)
- Transparent dissemination of information in a real-time way; minutes allowed for response and the creation of a virtual network
- Don't be competitive; have a clear degree of security that allows for "trust at the table" and very "fluid trust"
- Everyone involved is "heavily networked" and willing to share their networks
- Five core partners with multiple branch points for assets as needed
- Use the resources of partners as a way of indicating that you trust that partner and celebrate the work they have done
- The network becomes a partnership, resource, and asset to members for their own work
- Be a learning organization with ongoing and continuous evaluation of all points in the process
- Recognize and accept mistakes and successes as learning experience lessons and tools for growth and improvement

Environment Context and Barriers to Success

Schuylkill County is a rural county of about 145,000 people in an area of 783 square miles. They have only one city over 10,000 and many very small communities that are geographically spread throughout the mountains. Economically, Schuylkill County has lower incomes, less education, and more elderly than many Pennsylvania counties. This county is located in the “coal regions” and has seen a great drop in population, losing more than 40% in the 20th century.

In Schuylkill County, there are very few institutions that are able to bring resources to the county, so much of the work needs to be done through networks of relationships. The coalition, which is the basis for the new Schuylkill County Immunization Coalition, has been able to overcome barriers through working together and persistently trying new approaches over the last four years to find things that will work for their people.

Key Results or Implications of Success

The largest indicator of success is that, in Schuylkill County VISION's fourth year of working together, they were able to immunize over 2,600 people in a total population of 145,000. The indicator is their ability to continue to continuously rely on each other for other projects and programs.

Program Impact

Differences for partners: there has been a change in culture for the participants. These entities work together on a number of projects and have each other to discuss ideas with and can serve as strong colleagues to advance the success of all the work. The breaking down of isolation has been very helpful. For the county's congregations, it has given them the chance to offer public health services at some of their sites. Congregations have been able to answer more community needs. In the 2013 flu season, Immunization Coalition served over 2,600 people through the program. The results have been a great network of committed faith-health professionals in the county that can respond to emergent county needs.

Lessons Learned

The key elements are the common mission to serve the people of the county and the willingness and desire to work with others to achieve that goal. The blend of vision and people has been the glue that has made this work successful. The process has been “organic.” Although some of the steps have been difficult, VISION believes that it has made them stronger as a group and would do nothing differently.

“The distinctive strength we share with our partners is a focus on what will serve our county’s people most effectively.”

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