

Community Engagement Initiative Evaluation Report



KANSAS HEALTH
FOUNDATION

Evaluation of the Kansas Health Foundation's 2015–2018 Community Engagement Initiative

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Executive Summary

Community Engagement Initiative

The Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) funded the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) as a catalyst for change in communities with elevated concentrations of health risks, including high rates of poverty and unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, low-performing schools, and high rates of under/unemployment (KHF, 2014). Five organizations received three-year CEI grants (June 1, 2015–April 30, 2018) to engage residents in the development and implementation of Community Action Plans (CAPs):



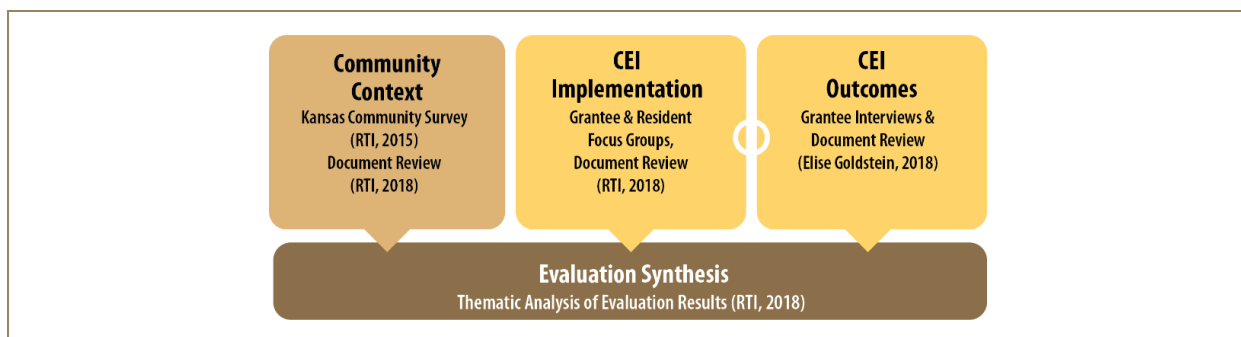
The goal of the CEI was to help these five Kansas communities become healthier and more vibrant places to live by increasing access to healthy affordable foods and opportunities for physical activity, improving student outcomes in community schools, and by making progress toward each community's vision of a healthy community.

Each grantee hired a local liaison/coordinator to develop partnerships across sectors and engage with community members, the media, organizational leaders, and government officials. KHF hired the Center for Global Policy Solutions (CGPS), a 501c3 organization based in Washington, DC, to design and manage the initiative (managing partner).




Evaluation

The evaluation of CEI involved several components and data sources, including interviews with grantees, KHF staff, and the managing partner, as well as focus groups with grantees and residents, and document review. This report focuses on results from CEI implementation and outcome evaluations.




Outcomes

Grantees reported that the CEI resulted in outcomes related to capacity, community engagement, and policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change.




Increased grantee and community capacity to implement community-driven PSE changes

- Thrive helped community residents build capacity to secure county funding.
- United Way Greater Topeka (UWGT) built capacity in grant writing; the organization leveraged its experience applying for the CEI to apply for another KHF grant.



Increased community engagement, pride, and connectedness

- UWGT noted an increase in attendance at the community's National Night Out event from 150 to 200 residents to 250 residents from one year to the next.
- Thrive now has residents from every municipality represented at monthly resident meetings.
- Residents in the Southwest Bricktown neighborhood (UWRC) are now leading the community meetings.
- Fairmount neighborhood (WSU) observed a greater diversity of residents attending neighborhood association meetings.



PSE changes

- WSU connected home owners to resources for home repairs in the Fairmount neighborhood.
- UWRC revitalized homes.
- Thrive established a rural vocational technical center with support from a private donor.
- UWGT established a wellness center that serves as a family practice clinic.

Implementation Experiences

Grantees shared factors that supported their community engagement efforts and implementation challenges:

Challenges

- Grantee plans did not always align with managing partner plans.
- Grantees valued the resident-led approach, but some felt the community visioning session was misaligned with community realities.
- Grantees noted engaging residents is challenging work; attendance at community meetings varied over grant period.
- Some residents reported the CEI aligned well with community priorities; however, some residents indicated CEI and community priorities could have been better aligned.
- Managing partner's evaluation tools and methods posed some challenges. For example, grantees noted length and literacy level of surveys did not work well for all resident respondents. Repeated survey administration was also burdensome.

Facilitators

- Funding well-established anchor organizations facilitates community engagement efforts.
- Small successes build momentum for bigger changes.
- KHF's reputation facilitated development of new partnerships.
- Grantees felt the managing partner provided a fresh perspective, including connection to people and resources grantees otherwise would not have access to or knowledge of.

Insights for Future Community Engagement Grantmaking

Insights gleaned from grantees' experiences with CEI may be useful for others implementing community engagement approaches to public health:

1. **Engage grantees in evaluation planning.** Future evaluations of similar initiatives may benefit from engaging grantees in the evaluation planning process. Grantees reported that the CGPS surveys used to create a "community health scorecard" could have been better tailored for resident respondents (e.g., the surveys could have been shorter). Grantees see value in evaluation and would have preferred to be engaged in selecting survey items. Grantees questioned the validity of the questions and usability of the data due to low sample sizes, changing sample frames, and unclear item wording. Engaging grantees in reviewing and providing feedback on draft data collection instruments may increase usability of results and minimize burden on grantees and their partners.
2. **Customize technical assistance (TA) to fit grantee needs.** Grantees had varying levels of need across TA areas and found some TA efforts not useful. Future initiatives targeting similar communities could improve grantee capacity and success by assessing grantees' TA needs at the outset and customizing TA for each grantee based on their needs.
3. **Include more training for residents.** Investing more time in building resident capacity to lead initiatives through formal leadership training may improve the impact and sustainability of future initiatives. Training for resident leaders could build local capacity for increasing engagement and PSE change.
4. **Approach community engagement work with flexibility; a one-size-fits-all approach does not work well for engaging residents.** Meeting residents where they were (especially with regard to identifying priorities) was critical for success. Although the CEI had overarching objectives for each grantee to meet, successful engagement of communities required (and KHF encouraged) grantees to actively listen to residents' concerns and engage them in identifying priorities. The KHF Program Officer suggested getting grantees involved earlier "to discover what they are interested in learning about their communities." Standardized requirements for grantees were intended to provide for uniform implementation; however, variation in community context and capacity called for a more flexible approach. Grantees were required to complete a standard Community Action Plan (CAP) containing five main objectives and conduct community visioning sessions; however, grantees had flexibility in how they implemented their CAPs and pushed back in some cases on the charrette process. The size and definition of the community, and the unique context of each, influenced the approach grantees took to engagement. Each community has its own identity and preferences, and success may come more easily to grantees who adapt their approach to fit their unique community. Future initiatives may benefit from allowing grantees and residents greater flexibility in identifying community priorities.
5. **Vet the community engagement capabilities of potential implementation partners.** When selecting a managing partner, identifying organizations with a proven community engagement track record, including specific examples of success and experience, may benefit grantees who need support with community engagement. There are benefits to working with an organization with experience in community engagement and an understanding of issues pertaining to rural and urban areas. Grantees found some unique value in the perspective of the DC-based implementation partner, so weighing the benefits

of local or regionally-based organizations versus organizations that may offer a wider range of perspectives is something to consider.

Ways CEI Work Is Being Sustained

Strategies to sustain CEI efforts include adopting a community engagement approach to KHF grantmaking, changes to grantees' organizational structure, and continued resident engagement in communities:

