BUILDING BETTER BEGINNINGS: A TOOLKIT

Community Resident Participation

4

Better Beginnings, Better Futures

An effective, affordable community project for promoting positive child development

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INTRODUCTION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The learning objectives for this chapter include:

1. **Motivation**
   Learn what motivates community residents to participate.

2. **Benefits**
   Understand and appreciate the benefits of community resident participation to the community residents, the program, and the community.

3. **Challenges**
   Understand and appreciate the challenges of engaging community residents and developing partnerships with them in community coalitions.

4. **Strategies**
   Be aware of strategies to address challenges that arise and to develop resident participation within the community.

5. **Principles**
   Know the guiding principles of engaging community residents and developing partnerships with them.

BETTER BEGINNINGS, BETTER FUTURES COMMUNITY RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

A brief history

The hallmark of the *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* program model is the meaningful, significant participation of the residents. Those sites that were awarded *Better Beginnings* grants had to show that they would be engaging residents as equal partners with service providers in the development and implementation of their programs.

During the proposal development stage, community residents were consulted through community meetings, surveys, and one-on-one discussions. However, there was little or no involvement of residents in the meetings and work that went into the development of the proposal. Further, the numbers of community residents consulted during the proposal development phase varied considerably from site to site. There were as few as 15 residents consulted in one site, and several hundred consulted in another. In fact, each of the sites experienced substantial barriers to community resident participation; lack of time, barriers relating to class, culture and language, inconvenient meeting times, and distrust of service providers, were barriers that simply could not be overcome in such a short amount of time, even with a financial incentive.

Once a community's proposal had been selected, and the sites moved into the planning and then demonstration phase,[1] each of the three sites worked hard to include residents in program development, implementation, delivery, and governance.

Better Beginnings staff, service providers, and researchers made diligent efforts to ensure that parents felt welcome, included, and an important part of building the local program. Structures were created to govern the project (i.e., main decision-making body, sub-committees or working groups) and residents were encouraged to get involved. Parents and residents were also encouraged to volunteer in program delivery. Strategies were employed to help overcome any possible barriers, including providing child care and transportation, having flexible meeting times, and having fun and social events so that parents, staff, and service providers could get to know one another. Roles for residents during the planning and demonstration phases of the project included serving as committee members, volunteering in program delivery, and taking on paid staff positions.

The amount of time and attention each site devoted to the resident participation aspect of the program initiative, and the success that they achieved with it, resulted in *Better Beginnings* achieving a reputation as a model of resident involvement. Many people, often accustomed to top-down initiatives, saw *Better Beginnings*, *Better Futures* as community-driven, rather than agency/expert-driven. In reality though, as will be seen in **Chapter 5: Engaging Community Partners**, it was a shared-power approach, among community residents, community partners, and program staff.

[1] *The proposal development phase occurred in 1990, the planning phase from 1991-1993, the demonstration phase from 1993-1997, and sustainability occurred when the projects received sustained funding beginning in 1998.*

A shared-power approach

Many, if not most, prevention programs are conceived, planned, and implemented from the top downwards by experts or professionals. However, when the *Better Beginnings* initiative was developed, there was a growing concern about the dominant role that professionals had played in these kinds of programs, and about the subordinate role played by the people who are meant to benefit. In response to those concerns, *Better Beginnings* used a shared-power approach where both professionals and community residents were equal partners, rather than an expert-driven approach.
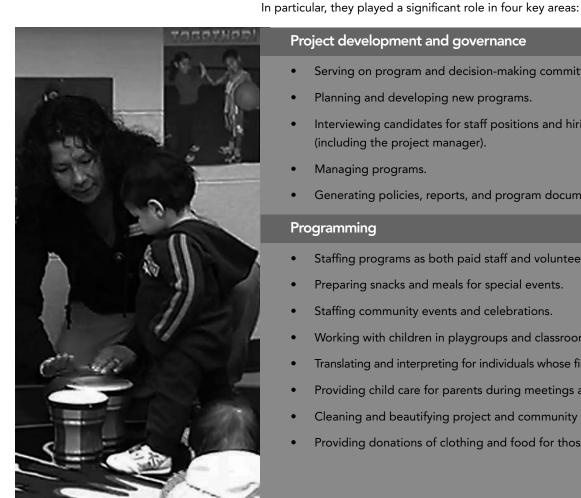
The *Better Beginnings* shared-power approach included several key characteristics:

- Community residents were meaningfully and significantly involved in defining the needs of the community and identifying programs and activities to meet those needs.

- Community residents were actively involved in all aspects of program development and delivery, as well as in all aspects of the research on the project. They were key decision-makers in the process of deciding what kinds of programs were needed, how these programs would be implemented, who would staff them, and where they would be offered. They were also included in how research was developed, implemented, analyzed, and reported.

- Community-building and community development were the foundation of much of the programming in *Better Beginnings* communities.

- Accessibility was a major concern in the approach to *Better Beginnings* programming. Every effort was made to make programs comfortable, geographically accessible, and available in the language(s) that residents spoke. Barriers to participation, such as transportation and the need for child care, were addressed to ensure residents could participate.

- Community events and celebrations were considered a crucial means of bringing individuals together and giving them a sense of community.

Residents' roles and activities

Community residents took on a great many roles in each of the *Better Beginnings* sites. In particular, they played a significant role in four key areas:

Project development and governance

- Serving on program and decision-making committees.

- Planning and developing new programs.

- Interviewing candidates for staff positions and hiring staff at every level (including the project manager).

- Managing programs.

- Generating policies, reports, and program documents.

Programming

- Staffing programs as both paid staff and volunteers.

- Preparing snacks and meals for special events.

- Staffing community events and celebrations.

- Working with children in playgroups and classrooms.

- Translating and interpreting for individuals whose first language was not English.

- Providing child care for parents during meetings and special events.

- Cleaning and beautifying project and community facilities.

- Providing donations of clothing and food for those in need in the community.

Residents' roles and activities *cont'd*

Community outreach and advocacy

- Reaching out to encourage other members of the community to participate and get involved in project activities.

- Making presentations about the project to a wide variety of audiences.

- Writing articles and reports on the project for newspapers and other print media.

- Raising funds for the project.

- Lobbying for health and safety improvements (e.g., stop signs and traffic lights).

- Creating and presenting workshops for other community members, service-providers, and teachers.

- Advocating for the community through written submissions and oral presentations to politicians and public bodies.

- Taking part in external boards and committees, and the task forces, of local agencies.

Research

- Developing questionnaires and interview questions.

- Conducting interviews.

- Reviewing reports.

- Serving as members of research teams/committees.

- Working as paid research staff.

Why community residents became involved

The shared power approach to the *Better Beginnings* initiative was very appealing to the community residents. The professionals and staff treated the community residents as equal partners in the *Better Beginnings* organization. When the program was being built and implemented, parents and community residents could actually see the results of what was often an exceedingly time-consuming community-building process. This was a very potent motivator for many community residents. Beyond that, community residents had different, but fairly consistent motives for becoming involved in *Better Beginnings* throughout the proposal development, demonstration, and sustainability phases, including:

- Enhancing the lives of children.

- Making the community a better place.

- Gaining employment.

- Reducing isolation — getting out of the house, meeting new people, and having something to do.

- Coming to an environment that was friendly, fun, and comfortable.

- Being involved in a Francophone environment where community residents could speak French and engage in Francophone culture (in those sites that had a significant Francophone population).

The benefits of community resident participation

There were many benefits or positive impacts of having community residents involved in program development, implementation, delivery, and governance. There were benefits for residents, benefits for the projects, and benefits for the communities.

Benefits for community residents

There were many different types of benefits that residents experienced from being involved with the *Better Beginnings*' projects, including:

- Achieving personal growth, development, and a sense of empowerment.

- Opportunities for learning (e.g., public speaking), training (e.g., improved English skills, development of employment skills), and re-entry into the workforce.

- Increased social and concrete support (i.e., more friends, access to concrete supports including food banks, clothing banks and child care).

- Positive impacts on lifestyle or quality of life — residents became more committed to a healthy lifestyle, became more aware of health issues, and had access to low or no-cost interesting and fun activities.

- Positive impacts and benefits for their children — more interaction with other children, more skill development, parents more aware of potential problems, children proud of their parents' involvement or volunteerism at the project sites.

Benefits for *Better Beginnings* projects

There were also benefits that the *Better Beginnings* projects experienced because of the degree of community resident participation that occurred.

- Critical contributions to program development and implementation — before all staff was hired, residents helped enormously in the implementation of programs; they also helped hire staff by participating on hiring committees and in interviews, and contributed ideas for programming because they were aware of the needs of the community.

- Positive impact on service providers — helped service providers work better with community residents which in turn made the programs more popular in the community.

- Improved perceptions of the project in the wider community — residents were instrumental in achieving this benefit through public presentations that they made.

Benefits for the communities

Finally, resident involvement in *Better Beginnings*, *Better Futures*, also had benefits for the communities:

- Increased sense of community, ownership, and responsibility for the community on the part of residents.

- Community improvements and increased social action — for example, through *Better Beginnings*, residents acquired better playground equipment, made changes that made their communities more attractive through art, as well as more safe and secure (e.g., better lighting, crosswalks).

APPROACH

How to Build Meaningful Resident Participation and Develop a Shared-Power Approach

This section covers the fundamentals of community resident participation. First, how do you begin to involve residents in your project or initiative? Who should be involved? What roles will residents play? If residents are involved in governance and decision-making, what consideration should be given as to whom they represent (e.g., are they speaking for a larger group)? Should there be remuneration for volunteers? And, what supports and resources are required in developing resident participation?

How to begin

The first step for stakeholders will be to consider their vision, their values, and their goals and objectives, and to be clear about why they wish to involve residents. Assuming that stakeholders are trying to develop a shared-power approach, as in *Better Beginnings*, then residents should be involved from the start in the design and development of the community initiative. However, how and why residents will be involved should be made clear to all participants.

In *Better Beginnings, Better Futures*, the government mandated that the projects were to meaningfully and significantly involve residents in all major aspects of program development, implementation,

and governance. It did not matter what programs were being implemented for whom; community residents needed to be involved in all of them. There were directives, however, that each community had to follow. The government mandated that the community development portion of the budget could not exceed 25% of the government grant. The bulk of the budget was to be focused on child and family programs for families of children aged 4 to 8. As well, the programs had to be high-quality and evidence-based.

The *Better Beginnings* sites only achieved significant and meaningful resident involvement slowly and with a great deal of effort. Stakeholders typically began with a

pre-existing group of residents or parents and/or they hired a community developer or facilitator whose job was to seek out and involve local residents and parents. The community developer role is crucial — and that person should be selected carefully. In one site it took several attempts before the position was filled by an effective staff person whom the residents and parents liked and who had the energy and skills it took to actively recruit new volunteers.

Once some residents became involved in project committees and program delivery, word-of-mouth helped to recruit additional volunteers.

TIPS

Tips to consider when beginning to recruit community residents into your initiative:

Be clear about the reasons why you are recruiting community residents to be involved; for example:

- To help design appropriate programs that meet the needs of your community;

- To provide skill development opportunities for residents in the community; and

- To help increase community pride and ownership.

All stakeholders involved — staff, residents, and service providers — will need to understand the roles that residents will play in the initiative and the scope of their involvement. For example, these roles could include:

- Decision-making as members of project governance committees;

- Planning and developing programs;

- Conducting community outreach and advocacy;

- Volunteering for different programs; and/or

- Acting as consultants or research assistants in the evaluation or research.

Ensure all stakeholders involved understand the shared-power approach mandate — its meaning and its limitations.

- If a written mandate has not already been developed by your funders/ government, collaborate with your stakeholders to create a written mandate describing what is meant by a "shared-power" approach.

- Ensure the mandate includes any limitations or guidelines set by funders/government. For example, in the proposal development stage of *Better Beginnings*, the government was disappointed with the lack of meaningful, significant community resident involvement. Because of this, they put forward a guideline that every major committee or sub-committee had to include at least 50% parents or residents.

Begin with a group of residents or parents who are already involved in the community. For example, at one *Better Beginnings* site, the school principal initially went to the school's parent group to recruit volunteers.

If a community developer or facilitator is being hired, that person must relate well to the community, and have the necessary skills and energy to motivate and recruit residents to participate.

If possible, include residents on your hiring committee or in the interviewing process when selecting a community developer. The residents will provide valuable input as to whether they feel comfortable with the candidates.

Who should be involved?

In *Better Beginnings*, there was a need to recruit parents of children in the age-range for the program. Without those community residents, the sites could not have known if they were meeting the needs of those parents. However, other community residents were also recruited who were committed to the initiative. Your prevention project may be intended for specific age groups, and therefore, you may need to ensure that those residents are included in your project. As well, if your neighbourhood has prominent minority or ethnic groups, then you will want to reach out to them. A good way to do this is to distribute any information about the initiative in multiple languages. Consult with other organizations and agencies who work in your community about where to find these residents. Knowledge of your community will be key in knowing where to go to recruit potential participants.

In *Better Beginnings*, stakeholders did try to recruit parents who had children in the targeted schools, or in the targeted age range. They also included residents from the most prominent ethnic or cultural groups in their communities. However, given that each of the program sites also included a community development component, it was not necessary that the residents had children in target schools or, indeed, that they were parents. Programs encompassed under the community development component could be far-reaching and really tried to respond to the unique needs of each community.

As well, you will need to consider if there are certain skills that residents should possess. Or, will it suffice to have willing participants, who can be trained to develop any necessary skills? If you have an abundance of volunteers, then selecting by skills may maximize everyone's potential.

If not, consider training volunteers. In *Better Beginnings*, early on there were few who stepped forward so an abundance of volunteers was not an issue; in this case, waiting for individuals with certain skills limits resident participation and the project.

TIPS

Tips to consider regarding who should be involved:

Is there a particular group or groups of residents you are trying to serve with the programs you are developing? For example, parents of children in a particular age range, parents from particular ethnic groups, youth? If so, you may want to recruit residents from those populations.

If you are trying to attract minority groups you will need to address any cultural or language issues in your recruitment:

- Use different strategies to recruit different cultural groups — some methods may work for one cultural group but not for another. Talk to others who know the community and learn from their experience about what works best.

- Be respectful of cultural norms in recruitment — some strategies may be inappropriate for certain cultures. Again, talk to those who have experience working with residents in the community.

- Ensure that any written information is distributed in multiple languages.

If resources allow, use a community developer to help recruit volunteers.

Are you expecting to be inundated with potential volunteers? If so, then you may need to consider if you should recruit volunteers with certain skills (e.g., those who have had previous committee work, those with experience in the different types of programs you'll be implementing, those who have done outreach).

Which roles should residents play?

In the *Better Beginnings* initiative it was clear that residents were to be equal partners with service providers and staff. The projects had to have community residents deeply involved in program design, development, implementation, and management/governance. To that end, the sites sought out residents to participate on decision-making bodies, sub-committees or working groups, and planning sessions. A primary goal was to seek parents' and community residents' opinions in these various meetings so that residents' voices were heard and that programs reflected their input. *Better Beginnings* also relied on community residents to assume major responsibilities, either as volunteers or paid staff in program delivery. As well, residents played a critical role in advocacy efforts on behalf of the project and for the community.

TIPS

Tips to consider regarding what roles residents should play:

What are you hoping to achieve by having residents involved in your initiative? Your ultimate goals should help dictate the types of roles that residents should assume. For example:

- If residents are to help you design appropriate programs that meet the needs of your community, then they will need to be involved in decision-making when the programs are being planned and implemented. They will also need to be involved in governance to ensure that the programs continue to meet the needs of the community in the future.

- If one of your goals is to help residents develop skills that could help them acquire jobs, or better jobs, then you will need to ensure that there are opportunities provided that will help them in this skill development. These roles or opportunities could include training (e.g., for specific duties in program delivery, for chairing meetings, taking minutes), volunteering in program delivery, and opportunities for public speaking and advocacy.

- Having community residents involved in program delivery (either as volunteers or paid staff), advocacy, and community outreach will also help fulfill the goal of increased community responsibility and ownership.

Be aware that not all residents will want to take on different roles. It was clear in *Better Beginnings* that some residents relished their roles as decision-makers and advocates. However, others were less comfortable with those sorts of roles and were much more comfortable doing things such as helping out in the kitchen or with child care.

While respecting comfort levels, you can also gently encourage residents and provide some coaching to help them to stretch themselves to assume different types of roles:

- They may start out helping with a community event, or in the kitchen, or with child care.

- You can then encourage them to attend a meeting or help plan a program.

- In *Better Beginnings*, this encouragement worked best once the volunteer knew the staff well and trusted them.

- It also helped if it was another parent or resident who had "graduated" to more decision-making roles encouraging others to participate in other roles and opportunities.

- Be sure, however, only to encourage — do not badger or intimidate.

Staff time will need to be dedicated not only to recruit volunteers, but also to help them feel comfortable and develop their skills and abilities.

- In *Better Beginnings* each of the program sites went out of its way to make residents and parents feel comfortable and welcomed.

- Staff took the time to talk to parents and residents and get to know them. By doing so, they learned where their interests and skills lay and subsequently encouraged them to volunteer and get more involved.

- Staff took the time to help train volunteers and develop their skills — this was done both formally and informally.

Hiring of community residents for staff positions

Hiring neighbourhood residents was a major strategy adopted at all project sites to incorporate resident wisdom into project and program development.

It was clear that resident employment had a substantial impact on the project. Yet, there were unanticipated effects and challenges that were faced in hiring active community members as staff:

- The "loss" of usually the most active volunteer leaders as they became staff.

- Confusion as resident staff continued to hold board or committee positions that they had held as volunteers.

- A "loss of status" as employed residents felt they lost their voice as community representatives and as they found themselves supervised by professionals.

- Tensions with neighbourhood peers not in staff positions.

- Loss of incentives for some residents to volunteer if they did not obtain staff positions for which they had applied.

TIPS

Tips to consider when hiring active neighbourhood residents:

Be clear with residents when they apply for staff positions about what they might face or have to give up if they become staff, for example:

- Residents may face disappointment if they don't get the job.

- Residents may experience some tensions with other residents, if others were applying for the same job and were not successful.

- They will probably have to give up their positions on any decision-making bodies due to conflict of interest.

- They may lose a sense of camaraderie with other volunteer residents, as they probably will not have as much time to spend with the volunteers.

Whom do residents represent when involved in governance/decision-making?

It is not always clear when residents become involved with community initiatives, as voting members of decision-making bodies, whom they represent. Service providers represent their agencies or organizations. But do resident volunteers on a committee represent just themselves or a larger constituency? If possible, it would be best if residents represent larger constituencies than themselves in decision-making processes, so that more resident voices are heard.

If you have a few assertive and opinionated residents on a decision-making body, whose opinions may not be representative of most of the community, then problems could occur and programs could be less successful.

Structures need to be put in place and the processes need to be clear to all involved. For example, there could be neighbourhood groups that are developed (or that already exist) that resident volunteers in the community initiative consult with on a regular basis. When resident volunteers come to the decision-making table, then, they can come with the ideas and feedback of a group of residents from a neighbourhood group.

In *Better Beginnings* it is unclear whether this discussion ever took place in the local sites; there is no mention of it in our documentation to date. Nonetheless, it is an important question and should be addressed.

TIPS

Tips to consider regarding resident representation:

Be clear about who residents are representing on decision-making bodies.

If possible, residents should represent a larger constituency so that more residents have input at the decision-making level.

If larger constituencies are sought, then structures and processes will need to be put in place and be clear to all involved.

Be clear that while community residents are members of a particular ethnic or cultural group, they are not being asked to represent only that group when making decisions.

Whenever possible, residents should represent the whole community.

Should community volunteers be reimbursed?

One of the difficult issues faced early on by the *Better Beginnings* sites had to do with payment of community volunteers. Discussions, sometimes lengthy and heated, occurred at the sites about if and how residents should be compensated for things that might be considered to be "volunteer" activities, such as attending meetings, organizing community events, and helping out with programs. The *Better Beginnings* sites all decided to reimburse any expenses that residents might incur such as child care and transportation. In some cases residents were also compensated on a fee-for-service basis for specific, time-limited tasks, such as cooking and serving meals at meetings, custodial work such as taking down playgroup decorations and equipment, and serving as breakfast attendants.

While residents, for the most part, were not paid for their volunteer activities, there was still a desire to recognize the contributions of community members to the projects.

Sometimes, residents were presented with honoraria (e.g., $100) for the work they did. Or, fun and special events were planned to recognize volunteer efforts.

TIPS

Tips to consider regarding resident payment:

Payment for strictly volunteer activities such as attending meetings, organizing events, and helping out with programs is not necessary or advisable for several reasons:

- It is very expensive.

- It may create tensions or problems if community volunteers are paid for some things but not others.

- It is still possible to recruit and retain volunteers without providing payment.

Any expenses incurred by community volunteers (e.g., child care, transportation) should be covered.

All volunteers should be recognized for their efforts.

If resources allow, provide honoraria for those who have gone "above and beyond" or whose volunteer work has been exceptional in some way.

Volunteer recognition events go a long way in showing appreciation and are major sources of increased community pride.

What supports and resources are required to recruit and retain community volunteers?

In order to create and maintain meaningful community resident participation, community initiatives will need to devote adequate supports and resources to this effort. In the *Better Beginnings* sites, a community developer or facilitator helped to recruit and train resident volunteers. This person, as well as other staff, also provided support and encouragement to residents. The projects were friendly, welcoming, inviting places to be, and staff needed to ensure that they had the time to spend with residents when they dropped in to the *Better Beginnings* centre. Residents were encouraged and supported during committee meetings, working groups, and planning days. Staff and stakeholders made sure to plan events that allowed residents, staff and service providers to get to know one another. Project resources, including staff time and budget, therefore, were dedicated to these types of events. Finally, resident contributions to the projects were recognized (e.g., by holding volunteer appreciation events, providing honoraria, providing gift certificates) — resources were necessary for this to occur as well.

TIPS

Tips to consider regarding resources and supports necessary to recruit and retain community volunteers:

It is a good idea to have a full-time community developer/facilitator or volunteer coordinator to take on the lead role in recruiting and retaining community residents.

As well, you need staff time dedicated to resident recruitment, support, training, and skill building.

It is important to have a wide variety of opportunities for residents so that their interests and skills can be matched to the activities in which they are engaged.

Financial resources should also be dedicated to:

- Recognizing the volunteer efforts of residents (e.g., recognition dinners, gift certificates, honoraria);

- Covering any expenses incurred by community residents (e.g., child care, transportation);

- Reimbursing community residents who provide services such as cooking or custodial work; and

- Translation services for project materials (if required).

CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY RESIDENT PARTICIPATION AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THEM

Having residents involved in program design, development, implementation, and governance resulted in many benefits and positive outcomes — as described previously. Nonetheless, each site experienced its own barriers, obstacles, and challenges in meaningfully involving residents in their projects. These challenges are described in this section. The strategies that could be used to deal with each of these challenges are also discussed.

Community residents' apprehension and discomfort

One of the challenges or obstacles to involving residents in *Better Beginnings* was that many residents were anxious about meeting others. Some were shy or withdrawn or were used to staying at home. Some residents found it difficult or challenging to work with some professional service providers. Some were even distrustful or fearful that being close to such people could create problems such as having their children apprehended through child welfare or losing their public housing.

A common barrier or complaint, early on, was that the meetings were quite formal and residents were unused to the language and jargon being used by the professionals. This just increased community residents' discomfort.

During the early planning phase, there was a power imbalance as service providers or professionals spoke more and voiced their opinions, and residents felt intimidated and lacked the assertiveness to speak up.

Finally, some parents and community residents were intimidated because they did not speak English or French fluently, or maybe not at all.

Better Beginnings staff and service providers worked diligently to overcome each of the barriers and challenges described above. The strategies listed below are gleaned from the lessons learned in overcoming these challenges at each of the sites.

STRATEGIES

- Chat with residents at locations where they are likely to show up (e.g., dropping their kids off at school, in the playground). Be friendly. Invite them to drop by, and when they do, ensure that they are welcomed warmly.

- Create a warm, friendly, fun, and welcoming environment so that residents will want to stay and get involved.

- Host informal events in order for people to get to know one another. Sharing food was an absolute hit at the *Better Beginnings* sites! Potluck lunches and dinners are a great way to get to know one another.

- Keep meetings as informal as possible. Keep jargon to a minimum. Don't use acronyms — or at least explain what they are.

- Don't let committees become too large.

- Encourage residents to speak up and try to prevent power imbalances.

- If language barriers are an issue, get creative! At *Better Beginnings* sometimes meetings were conducted in two or more languages, with everyone waiting patiently for every statement to be translated. At other times, translation would take place informally.

- Set a goal to have at least one-half of every major committee comprised of community residents.

- As community residents become familiar and confident in their role as committee members, encourage them to take on leadership roles (e.g., chairing a committee). This, in turn, will give other residents the courage to become involved too — when residents see a resident in a position of responsibility, it encourages them too.

- Provide written materials in plain language and in multiple languages.

Conflicting commitments, difficulties "juggling", and potential burn-out

In the *Better Beginnings* sites, stakeholders reported that it was often difficult to get some residents involved because they were busy with other commitments and had little time to devote to the project. For that reason the project did attract many more stay-at-home mothers than it did other residents in the communities. When residents did get involved in *Better Beginnings* they reported that sometimes it was difficult for them to juggle all of their responsibilities. The poverty and financial hardship in which many residents lived, along with daily life hassles, resulted in residents feeling overwhelmed and stressed, with little energy left over to give to the projects.

Early on in the projects, when residents were heavily involved in program development and implementation, there were some residents who simply "burned out."

They had put in too much time and energy, and had to withdraw or reduce their commitments to the project.

STRATEGIES

- Try to address or remove any potential difficulties that could further impede a resident's involvement (e.g., paying for child care, transportation).

- Provide child care on-site while parents are in meetings.

- Change meeting times to accommodate residents' work and child care schedules.

- Provide lunches, snacks, or other meals to volunteers. The financial help this provides may be an incentive.

- Try to make it as much fun as possible so that residents want to participate.

- Monitor the level of involvement of more heavily involved neighbourhood residents. Be aware that "burn-out" is a possibility and try to ensure that those individuals take some time off, or try to ensure that work is spread out evenly.

Ethnic tensions, language barriers, and cultural differences

In each site, stakeholders had to deal with some challenges with respect to language, culture, and/or ethnicity.

- One site was a very multicultural newcomer community. It was impossible to have representatives at the site who spoke all the nearly 40 different languages in that school.

- At this site it also became clear that some residents came from countries where volunteerism was not expected or done.

- Another site faced challenges ensuring equal voice across three major cultural groups — Anglophone, Francophone, and Aboriginal.

- Another site was Francophone and faced barriers or challenges when Anglophone residents wished to be involved.

STRATEGIES

- Ensure that you hire staff who represent your community in terms of ethnicity, culture and language.

- If English, or French, is the main language being used, be extremely encouraging to residents just learning to speak the language(s).

- Provide extra outreach and encouragement to newcomer residents who may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with volunteerism.

- Make project materials available in different languages.

- Wherever possible, provide translation and interpretation at meetings, events, interviews, etc.

- Hold workshops on intercultural relations.

Failed expectations and disappointments

Each site had to tackle the failed expectations and various disappointments of some community residents.   Some residents reported feeling under-valued for their work. Each site sought out residents for staff positions. However, a resident who applies for a job and is not successful may be disappointed and resentful. Further, if a position goes to one volunteer resident, and not another, it may lead to feelings of favouritism and jealousy. As well, residents' expectations about what can be changed in the community may be too lofty or unreasonable and lead to disappointment. They may also be unclear about what is expected of them, which may lead to frustration.

STRATEGIES

- Set objective standards for hiring staff.

- Be as transparent as possible in decision-making.

- Ensure you make efforts to recognize and value volunteer efforts.

- Develop a volunteer toolkit to make roles/duties clear.

- Provide training opportunities for resident volunteers and staff.

- Be aware of conflicts and issues and take steps to address them. Don't ignore these issues. Use an impartial mediator, if required.

- Be clear about what can reasonably be expected to be achieved.

Turnover

The *Better Beginnings* communities tended to be transient communities. Residents sometimes left and it would take some time to recruit and train new ones. As well, residents who became real leaders in the programs often went on to paid positions, and again, new residents would need to be recruited and trained to replace them.

Lack of resources

As with any community initiative, *Better Beginnings* sites had to deal with the challenge of limited resources. There was not always the staff time available to support and train potential volunteers.   Further, because of the high turnover, *Better Beginnings* sites did not always benefit from the resources put into training residents. Finally, they did not always have the money and time required to include newcomers to Canada. Although project materials were often translated into the main languages, and there were often residents involved already who spoke some of the main languages, it was impossible to translate or interpret all languages.

STRATEGIES

- Ensure adequate resources to address turnover; that is, that staff time is dedicated to recruiting and supporting newcomers to the project.

- For key resident roles in the initiative (e.g., committee members), request or require a minimum length of involvement.

STRATEGIES

- As mentioned above, be clear that when residents take on important roles, the expectation is that they will be involved long-term.

- Reach out to your community partners to see if they can also take on some responsibility for training residents.

- Try to seek out resources to deal with potential language barriers; again, partners may be able to help in this regard.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principles for Meaningful, Significant Community Resident Participation

1. Agency and organizational partners must adopt a clearly articulated philosophy of empowering residents and ensuring their meaningful, significant involvement in the initiative.

    - There needs to be a deep belief in the positive benefits and impacts that empowering residents can have on the community initiative.

    - The involvement of neighbourhood residents in developing, implementing and publicizing programs is crucial to ensure that programs meet the needs of the community and have high levels of participation.

    - This philosophy and belief helps to remind stakeholders, staff, and residents where they are trying to go and to sustain them when the struggles come.

2. Everyone involved in the initiative should be committed to the community development process and empowering residents, and they should be flexible.

    - It is important that all staff are committed to involving residents meaningfully.

    - Everyone needs to be aware that community development initiatives rarely proceed smoothly without any challenges or obstacles — understanding and flexibility are important to keep everyone on track.

    - Acknowledge explicitly that conflict will happen and co-develop a resolution process to reduce potentially negative impacts.

3. The initiative should take steps to remove any potential barriers to participation.

    - Provide child care and transportation.

    - Provide snacks or meals.

    - Have flexible meeting times.

    - Ensure that meetings or any committee work are informal. Include some social or "check-in" time. And, try to plan events that help everyone get to know one another. Potluck dinners or lunches have worked really well!

4. Programs need to be responsive to community wants and needs.

    - Listening to the community and acting quickly to serve them, if possible, can have a positive effect on program participation.

5. Hiring residents is vital to the initiative's success.

    - Residents can be more sensitive to the community needs.

    - They can relate to different ethnic and cultural groups.

    - They elicit greater levels of trust and participation from the community.

    - However, residents should be hired on the basis of their skills, not only because they have experience living in the community.

6. It is crucial to publicly recognize and value volunteer efforts and contributions.

    - Plan special events or activities to reward or acknowledge the efforts of your volunteers.

    - Recognition dinners, small gifts, or honoraria are effective ways of showing appreciation to residents.

7. Good leadership and staffing is important.

    - Residents respond to those who reach out to include them. Ensure that your staff are caring and welcoming and encourage the residents to speak up and voice their opinions. A good sense of humour also helps!

8. Stakeholders must willingly invest considerable time, effort, and resources into empowering residents and ensuring their meaningful involvement.

    - Time and effort are required to build trusting interpersonal relationships.

    - Good interpersonal relations based upon mutual trust and respect are important.

    - Ensure that everyone gets to know one another personally and have safe environments in which to interact.

9. Be clear about resident roles.

    - The roles that residents play should be clear, straightforward, and as unambiguous as possible.

10. Ensure ongoing monitoring and review.

    - Through retreats or planning days, ensure that you "check in" on the level of resident participation. Are any changes necessary? Should committees recruit new members to keep ideas fresh? Are there new training opportunities that should be extended to residents?

Implementation/Evaluation Checklist

☐ Are you clear with regard to your philosophy, vision and goals as to why you want to include residents in your initiative?

☐ Have you thought specifically about what residents you would like to have involved? If there is a target audience for your programs, then you may want to recruit from that target audience.

☐ Considering your goals and objectives, have you thought about which roles the residents will play in your initiative?

☐ Should residents on decision-making bodies represent larger constituency groups? Or do they simply represent themselves?

☐ Have you thought about what type of recognition you will give to residents? Will they be paid or compensated in some way?

☐ Do you have the necessary supports and resources in place to ensure adequate resident participation (e.g., staff, financial)?

☐ How will you go about monitoring or reviewing the nature of the resident participation?

APPENDICES

Appendix A:
On-line Resources and Abstracts

On-line resources:

1. **http://ohioline.osu.edu/cd-fact/l700.html**
    Citizen participation in community development.

2. **http://johnwgardnertestsite.pbworks.com/w/page/13471090/Comprehensive-Family-and-Youth-Resources**
    National standards for parent/family involvement programs.

Abstracts

Arnstein, Sherry R. (1969). **A ladder of citizen participation.** *American Institute of Planners Journal, 35(4),* 216-224. [http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html]

This is a classic and very important article that has been cited over 4,000 times since its original publication in 1969. The focus of this article is on the extent to which "have-not" individuals in the community are given real power to make decisions about programs and policies that affect their lives and their communities. Arnstein describes eight kinds of citizen participation, each visualized as a rung on a ladder. At the lowest rungs (manipulation and therapy), citizen participation is only token, because citizens have no real power to influence decisions. At the middle rungs (informing, consultation and placation), citizens have a voice, but lack the power to ensure that their views will be heeded. At the upper-most rungs (partnership, delegated power and citizen control) citizens have the power to voice their views, and to have these views reflected in the decisions that are made.

Cameron, G., Peirson, L., & Pancer, S.M. (1994). **Resident participation in the *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* prevention project: Part II — Factors that facilitate and hinder involvement.** *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 13(2),* 213-227.

Resident participation is the cornerstone of any community-based prevention program. However, many challenges exist which make it difficult to involve residents in a meaningful way in the development of such programs. How can programs be organized so as to provide for significant participation of community residents in the process of program development? This article outlines the procedures that were utilized in seven community-based prevention programs established under the Better Beginnings, Better Futures initiative of the Government of Ontario to enlist the participation of community residents in program decision-making and implementation.

Abstracts, cont'd

Nelson, G., Pancer, S.M., Hayward, K., & Kelly, R. (2004). **Partnerships and participation of community residents in health promotion and prevention: Experiences of the Highfield Community Enrichment Project.** *Journal of Health Psychology, 9,* 205-219.

The authors provide a description and analysis of the role of partnerships between community residents and service-providers in planning and implementing a health promotion/prevention program for children and families. The context for this study is the Highfield Community Enrichment Project, a multi-component, community-based promotion/prevention project operating in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The nature and amount of resident participation in this project are described, as well as barriers to resident participation and strategies to reduce those barriers. The findings are interpreted in terms of empowerment and partnership theory, and the implications of these findings for involving citizens from low-income communities in planning promotion/prevention programs are discussed.

Pancer, S.M., & Cameron, G. (1994). **Resident participation in the *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* prevention project: Part I — The impacts of involvement.** *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 13(2),* 197-211.

What impact does the involvement of community residents in developing prevention programs have on the residents themselves, the programs they help to create, and the communities in which they live? The research literature suggests that resident involvement in program decision making can enhance residents' sense of control or empowerment, improve programs and services, and provide a better match between the needs of the community and the kinds of services provided. Much of this literature, however, has focused on relatively few of the benefits and costs that residents can experience as a result of their involvement. The investigation reported in this paper utilized a qualitative research methodology to discover the outcomes, both positive and negative, that residents derive from their involvement. Prevention programs operating in seven Ontario communities under the auspices of the *Better Beginnings, Better Futures* primary prevention initiative are featured in the discussion.

Wandersman, A., & Florin, P. (2000). **Citizen participation and community organizations.** *In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman, (Eds.), Handbook of community psychology (pp. 247-272).* New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

This chapter provides a conceptual framework for understanding the ways in which citizens participate in community programs and organizations. Among other things, it reviews research that addresses questions such as *"why do some people participate in community organizations while others do not?"*, *"what kinds of organizational environments facilitate effective citizen participation?"*, and *"what are the benefits of participation for individuals and their communities?"*.

Better Beginnings, Better Futures

An effective, affordable community project for promoting positive child development