

ATOD evaluation protocol: *Needs Assessment Prioritization*

Background

The first step in this needs assessment is to fill in the *Needs Assessment Workbook* created by Wilder. After the workbook is complete, you will prioritize the data in the Workbook to determine which variables are the most important to address in your community.

The main purposes of the overall needs assessment are to:

- 1) Identify the intervening variables that contribute to youth alcohol use in your funded community.
- 2) Determine if additional or alternative strategies are needed to address the local intervening variables.
- 3) Build the coalition's capacity in collecting, compiling, and using data for planning.
- 4) Establish a system for making data-driven decisions as a coalition.

You will be required to update the *Need Assessment Workbook* annually, but the most significant data collection, compilation, and prioritization will occur during the first year of the grant.

Overview of prioritization process

Intervening variables are factors that have been identified through research as influencing substance use patterns in a community. These factors can alter how much alcohol is consumed in a community (NH Risk and Protective Factor Toolbox, 2008).

In order to identify which intervening variables are most important for your coalition to address, it is essential that 1) your decisions are driven by the data in the *Needs Assessment Workbook* and any other relevant data or information your coalition has access to and 2) your coalition is actively involved in making these decisions. This protocol includes three options for how you may choose to approach the prioritization in your coalition. Each option fulfills the purposes of this activity, but allows you some flexibility to make sure the process fits for your coalition's skills, interest, and structure. It is important to follow the protocol closely for the option you select, so carefully consider which option is the best fit for your coalition before beginning the process.

Prioritization criteria

There are four main criteria you will use to prioritize the intervening variables included in the *Needs Assessment Workbook*:

1. **Magnitude** is addressed by the question “**How meaningful is the SIZE of this issue in your community?**” and it refers to how big or small the value is in your community data. It can be

measured by considering the following questions: What percent of the community is impacted? Is the rate or percent high or low compared to other intervening variables in your community? Is the rate or percent high or low compared to the state average? If data are available for multiple points in time, has the rate or percent changed over time? To assess magnitude, use the data for each intervening variable included in your *Needs Assessment Workbook*.

2. **Political will** or “**How much do community leaders/members care about this issue?**” encompasses readiness, concern, and willingness to take action. For example, political will might include community willingness to raise taxes on alcohol, or readiness to take on the hospitality or alcohol industries. Readiness may include a number of dimensions, such as the community’s recognition of substance use/abuse problems, the availability of needed resources, a plan for addressing substance use/abuse concerns, and leaders positioned to take action. To assess political will, use information from the *One-on-one Conversations*, *PCN Community Readiness Assessment*, and any other information you have about the perspectives of community members and leaders.
3. **Capacity** or “**What level of resources do you have available to address this issue?**” refers to your coalition or community’s ability to implement programs, policies, and other changes designed to reduce the likelihood of substance abuse. Elements include: staff time, skills, experience, and expertise; training and technical assistance; organizational systems; communication systems; technology; fiscal resources; etc. To assess capacity and resources, use information from the *One-on-one Conversations*, *PCN Community Readiness Assessment*, *Fiscal Host Questionnaire*, and any other information you have about the resources in your coalition and community.
4. **Changeability** or “**How easy is it to change the value of the variable over the course of the grant?**” encompasses time frame, readiness, and capacity. Can your community make a change in a given variable by the end of the project? To assess changeability, use data from the *Needs Assessment Workbook*, *One-on-one Conversations*, *PCN Community Readiness Assessment*, and any other information you have about the resources in your coalition and community.

Your coalition members will rate each intervening variable based on each of these criteria. The variables will be rated relative to each other. For example, based on your local data, which variables are more or less concerning than the other variables on the list? If you have different information for the same intervening variable, rate the one that has the greatest magnitude. For instance, if you have two school districts in your funded area and one district shows that 68% of students got alcohol at parties and the other district shows that 32% of students get alcohol at parties, rate the variable on all four criteria based on the school district that has 68% and note that you focused on just that school district.

The process that is used to rate each intervening variable will be based on the option you select below. However, it is important that all coalition members understand these criteria so they can make consistent, informed decisions about the intervening variables.

Guidelines for selection

There are some general guidelines that you should consider as you prioritize your intervening variables. These include:

- It is recommended that your community select six to eight intervening variables to address with programs, policies, and practices. The process of selecting priorities to address should be data driven—not based on a required number. However, keep in mind that too few intervening variables will not provide your community with a comprehensive prevention approach while too many variables may not be feasible given the budget and timeline.
- You need to make sure that you have at least two categories of variables represented in your final list of intervening variables. As a reminder, these categories include: retail access/availability, social access/availability, enforcement and courts, community norms, individual factors, and pricing/promotion. At least two categories need to be represented because your prevention efforts need to be comprehensive. You can aim to have more than two categories represented, but the determination should be driven by the data.

Prioritization process - Option 1: Preliminary rating

Overview

The first option includes inviting all coalition members to rate the intervening variables in advance and then presenting the results at a coalition meeting to guide a decision about which variables are most important to focus on in your community. This option is beneficial because it allows all coalition members to have a significant voice in the prioritization, maintains the data-driven nature of the process, and lessens the time needed for prioritization at a coalition meeting. However, it also requires coalition members to engage in the rating outside of a meeting, which may be a barrier in some coalitions.

Step-by-step instructions

- **Train coalition members (P&I).** Before coalition members can rate the intervening variables, they need to be trained on data, the prioritization criteria, and the process being used. The P&I is responsible for training coalition members. Wilder Research has created a training PowerPoint and an accompanying handout that can be used by the P&I coordinator.
- **Share materials (P&I).** In order for coalition members to rate each of the intervening variables using each of the four criteria, they will need access to the fully completed *Needs Assessment Workbook* and any other supplemental information that will be used, including the *One-on-One Conversation* facilitated discussion notes and *PCN Community Readiness*

results. You may wish to distribute these materials in a packet so everything is easily accessible to coalition members.

- **Review materials (coalition members).** Before beginning the prioritization process, coalition members should review all of the data they received. This will ensure that they are familiar with the information and they are able to rate the intervening variables relative to one another.
- **Rate variables (coalition members).** Under this option, all coalition members will be asked to rate all of the intervening variables on all four criteria. P&Is will collect this information from coalition members using a Survey Monkey web-based form created by Wilder Research. Send a link to this form to all coalition members who have been trained on using the criteria and process. We suggest that you give coalition members one to two weeks to respond.
- **Compile ratings (Wilder).** When scheduling the collection and reporting of this information, be sure to include at least three business days for Wilder Research to compile all of the results. Wilder Research will summarize the number of responses for each criteria and each variable and will report the top 20 scoring variables overall.
- **Share results (P&I).** After the results have been compiled, gather coalition members, at a scheduled coalition meeting or a separate event, to share the results and select your community's intervening variables. P&Is should plan to present the top 20 compiled results with the coalition members at this meeting, or even before the meeting, to serve as the basis for subsequent decision-making.
- **Select intervening variables (RPC/P&I/coalition members).** At the meeting with coalition members, RPCs will be responsible for facilitating a discussion to select the variables that are most important to the coalition. The coalition member ratings should guide this selection, but coalition members can help to interpret the rankings and make the final decisions. The P&I is encouraged to create a list of the current strategies being implemented under the grant to help focus the discussion. RPCs should plan to team with another RPC to help take detailed notes during this process to help document how the decisions were made. The RPCs may also wish to record the discussion to help their fill in notes afterward.
- **Summarize the process and results (P&I/RPC).** The RPCs should submit their detailed notes to the P&I to develop a brief summary of the prioritization option chosen, the supporting evidence for the intervening variable ratings, the variables selection discussion, and the final selected variables. This summary should be submitted to ADAD within two weeks of the variable selection discussion.

Prioritization process - Option 2: Small group activity

Overview

The second option includes breaking the coalition into small groups and asking each group to rate a subset of the intervening variables based on the four criteria described above. Each group will present the results to guide a decision about which variables are most important to focus on in your community. This option is beneficial because it allows all coalition members to have a voice in the prioritization, maintains the data-driven nature of the process, and can all be accomplished in one meeting. However, it may require a longer meeting with adequate attendance and engagement from members, which may be a barrier in some coalitions.

Step-by-step instructions

- **Train coalition members (P&I).** Before coalition members can rate the intervening variables, they need to be trained on data, the prioritization criteria, and the process being used. The P&I is responsible for training coalition members. Wilder Research has created a training PowerPoint and an accompanying handout that can be used by the P&I coordinator. This training can occur at the beginning of the meeting in which the rating, presenting, and selecting occur.
- **Form small groups (P&I).** Split the coalition members into five groups. Each group will be assigned one or two intervening variable categories as follows:
 - a) Retail access/availability
 - b) Social access/availability
 - c) Enforcement and courts
 - d) Community norms
 - e) Individual factors and pricing/promotion

We strongly recommend using random assignment to divide the members into groups and assign categories. This will minimize the chances that individuals will select categories that they feel particularly strong about or partners that have similar views to themselves. You can have grantees draw numbers or names of categories to randomly assign them.

- **Share materials (P&I).** In order for coalition members to rate each of the intervening variables using each of the four criteria, they will need access to the sections of the completed *Needs Assessment Workbook* relevant to their assigned categories and any other supplemental information that will be used, including the *One-on-One Conversation* facilitated discussion notes and *PCN Community Readiness* results. You may wish to distribute these materials in a packet so everything is easily accessible to coalition members.

- **Review materials (coalition members).** Before beginning the prioritization process, coalition members should review all of the data they received. This will ensure that they are familiar with the information and they are able to rate the intervening variables relative to one another.
- **Rate variables (coalition members).** Under this option, small groups of coalition members will be asked to rate all of the intervening variables in their assigned categories on all four criteria. The groups should come up with one set of ratings for each variable and each criterion, rather than having each member of the small group come up with their own ratings. It is strongly encouraged that each small group use the Excel spreadsheet developed by Wilder Research to rate the variables because it will automatically score the variables based on the four criteria. This would require that each group has access to a computer, though, which may not be feasible. If this is not an option, each group can fill out the spreadsheet on paper and score the variables by hand.
- **Compile ratings (P&I).** All of the ratings should be compared to one another to develop a list of the top 20 intervening variables across all categories. If each group used the Excel spreadsheet to score their variables, then you can simply copy and paste the ratings for each category into the same spreadsheet and a list of the top variables will automatically be generated. These ratings will to serve as the basis for subsequent decision-making.
- **Share results (coalition members/P&I).** Once all of the groups have had time to rate the intervening variables in their assigned categories, each group will present the top 3-5 scoring variables from their category to the full coalition. They should plan to provide a very brief justification for how they reached the conclusions they did in their ratings. The P&I should also share the results of the top 20 ranked variables overall.
- **Select intervening variables (RPC/P&I/coalition members).** At the meeting with coalition members, RPCs will be responsible for facilitating a discussion to select the variables that are most important to the coalition. The coalition member ratings should guide this selection, but coalition members can help to interpret the rankings and make the final decisions. The P&I is encouraged to create a list of the current strategies being implemented under the grant to help focus the discussion. RPCs should plan to team with another RPC to help take detailed notes during this process to help document how the decisions were made. The RPCs may also wish to record the discussion to help their fill in notes afterward.
- **Summarize the process and results (P&I/RPC).** The RPCs should submit their detailed notes to the P&I to develop a brief summary of the prioritization option chosen, the supporting evidence for the intervening variable ratings, the variables selection discussion, and the final selected variables. This summary should be submitted to ADAD within two weeks of the variable selection discussion.

Prioritization process - Option 3: Subcommittee scoring

Overview

The third option includes creating a subcommittee of the coalition to rate the intervening variables. This subcommittee could be temporary just for the purpose of this prioritization or it could be a permanent epidemiological or data-focused subcommittee. This subcommittee will work together to rate all of the intervening variables based on the four criteria. The subcommittee will present the results to the larger coalition to guide a decision about which variables are most important to focus on in your community. This option is beneficial because it empowers particularly interested coalition members, maintains the data-driven nature of the process, and lessens the burden on members who are less interested in data. However, it limits the role of the full coalition and it may lead to a couple of coalition members dominating the direction of the coalition.

Step-by-step instructions

- **Train coalition members (P&I).** Even though a subcommittee of the coalition is responsible for doing most of the rating, it is important that the full coalition understand the process and prioritization criteria. This will allow them to make an informed decision about their level of interest in joining the subcommittee and it will ensure that members have a common understanding when they ultimately select the intervening variables to focus on. The P&I is responsible for training coalition members. Wilder Research has created a training PowerPoint and an accompanying handout that can be used by the P&I coordinator.
- **Form subcommittee (P&I).** Once coalition members understand the role of the subcommittee, they can be invited to join the group. It is important that this subcommittee include coalition members beyond project staff and it must include more than two coalition members to ensure that the ratings are based on consensus. While all coalition members are able to join the subcommittee, you may wish to personally invite members who you think have a particular interest or expertise in working with data. In addition, if there are community members who are not yet engaged with the coalition, but who have an interest or expertise in working with data, this may be a good opportunity to bring them into the coalition.
- **Share materials (P&I).** In order for subcommittee members to rate each of the intervening variables using each of the four criteria, they will need access to the fully completed *Needs Assessment Workbook* and any other supplemental information that will be used, including the *One-on-One Conversation* facilitated discussion notes and *PCN Community Readiness* results. You may wish to distribute these materials in a packet so everything is easily accessible to subcommittee members.
- **Review materials (coalition subcommittee members).** Before beginning the prioritization process, coalition subcommittee members should review all of the data they received. This

will ensure that they are familiar with the information and they are able to rate the intervening variables relative to one another.

- **Rate variables (coalition subcommittee members).** Under this option, the subcommittee of coalition members will be asked to rate all of the intervening variables on all four criteria. The group should come up with one set of ratings for each variable and each criterion, rather than having each member of the group come up with their own ratings. It may work well to have the subcommittee use the Excel spreadsheet developed by Wilder Research to rate the variables because it will automatically score the variables based on the four criteria.
- **Share results (coalition members).** Once the subcommittee has had time to rate the intervening variables, they will present the top 20 scoring variables overall (from across all categories) to the full coalition. If the subcommittee used the Excel spreadsheet to score their variables, a list of the top variables will automatically be generated. The group should plan to provide a brief justification for how they reached the conclusions they did in their ratings, including any relevant data that supported their scores. These ratings will serve as the basis for subsequent decision-making.
- **Select intervening variables (RPC/P&I/coalition members).** At the meeting with coalition members, RPCs will be responsible for facilitating a discussion to select the variables that are most important to the coalition. The subcommittee member ratings should guide this selection, but coalition members can help to interpret the rankings and make the final decisions. The P&I is encouraged to create a list of the current strategies being implemented under the grant to help focus the discussion. RPCs should plan to team with another RPC to help take detailed notes during this process to help document how the decisions were made. The RPCs may also wish to record the discussion to help their fill in notes afterward.
- **Summarize the process and results (P&I/RPC).** The RPCs should submit their detailed notes to the P&I to develop a brief summary of the prioritization option chosen, the supporting evidence for the intervening variable ratings, the variables selection discussion, and the final selected variables. This summary should be submitted to ADAD within two weeks of the variable selection discussion.