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Roots of Hope

A Community Suicide
Prevention Project



Roots of Hope Case Study

Collaboration/Coordination

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Collaboration/Coordination guiding principle: **Design programs to enhance collaboration among stakeholders.**

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration/Coordination is the Roots of Hope guiding principle that generated the most comments and insights from the project leads interviewed for these case studies. That's a good indicator of how important it has been for developing strong local initiatives.

This case study explores how and why a commitment to the collaboration/coordination guiding principle is crucial for a local initiative to be effective.

Three themes arose as we explored collaboration/coordination with project leads:

- 1. Relationship building is critical to success.** Building relationships, trust, and understanding are essential to good community collaboration/coordination.
- 2. An effective advisory committee requires care.** Advisory committee members can bring tremendous value, especially when an understanding of their roles and contributions is shared. While recruiting the right people isn't always linear, a fluid approach works best.
- 3. Long-term impact is important.** Collaboration/coordination offers excellent benefits, particularly when considering the sustainability and long-term impact of a project for the community (though it's not required for all activities).

This case study explores these themes and provides advice and examples to illustrate them.

ABOUT THE CASE STUDIES

Roots of Hope is a Canadian community-led suicide prevention model. It draws on strengths and expertise within communities to design and implement tailored local initiatives. Using a collaborative approach across many sectors, it seeks to reduce the impact of suicide in each participating community.

We developed Roots of Hope with experts and communities from across Canada and around the world. Its five pillars and 13 guiding principles provide a framework that each community can adapt to their own needs.

The seven Roots of Hope case studies in this series reflect the wisdom and experience of project leaders from Early Adopter communities across the country, who represent diverse populations in a range of urban, rural, and remote settings. The series focuses on what project leads found to be effective in tailoring and implementing Roots of Hope in their communities. While each case study highlights up to three guiding principles, every project leader interviewed stressed the collective value of all 13.

The work to create and test something new is very different from implementing a proven program. We would therefore like to acknowledge Early Adopter project leads for their courage and willingness to pilot a new approach with us. We would also like to thank them for so generously sharing their wisdom and insights, which will make the work of future communities easier and more effective.



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

Project leads found relationship building (within and beyond the community) critical to their initiatives' success. It was essential for fostering trust and mutual understanding, whether that involved relationships with advisory committee members or local champions. Taking a broad and diverse approach also encouraged unusual partnerships and perspectives that proved to be valuable.

Insight #1 Relationship building is not linear

Many project leads saw relationship-building as a key part of their role. For them, the value of Roots of Hope lies in being a “dot-connector”: nurturing partnerships between people with knowledge/capability and the organizations “on the ground” who are working to support those impacted by suicide or implementing suicide prevention projects.

This guiding principle helped to explain to others the importance of building partnerships and the paradigm for how Roots of Hope does its work.

Most of those we interviewed used a variety of approaches to reaching out, building relationships, and forming partnerships. Several identified one-to-one conversations as an effective strategy for relationship building. As one project lead put it, “One of the most important things I discovered was the importance of one-to-one conversations with key partners. It allows us to share our personal connection to suicide, not just our professional role. Doing this reinforces how important our work is and highlights the emotional impact on us as people. It was essential.”

Given the fluid nature of building relationships, several project leads also emphasized the importance of flexibility; for example, recognizing that a formal leadership role isn't essential for

everyone. According to one interviewee, “Many people didn't want to emphasize sitting on a committee, they just want to get busy doing the work.”

In many cases, project leads noted that relationship building didn't follow a direct path. As one of them explained, “When you're building relationships and trust... it's rarely linear... because sometimes the link between actions or the theme of suicide prevention isn't visible to all.” Another said that “Relationships helped create opportunities I could never have expected. Those from my previous work that ‘ended’ continue to live on in this project in new ways that create sustainability in the work.”

Insight #2 Local champions can be very influential

Local champions (and other key stakeholders) can be important sources of information and community knowledge. Other advantages they bring include an ability to share resources and presentations (so the local project doesn't have to create them) and model the commitment to collaboration/coordination. As one project lead said, “We created many presentations, but so many of those resources already existed. Using partner resources was more efficient and brought the added benefit that we could recognize their work.”

Relationship building often leads to important connections, including opportunities to identify community champions, whose credibility in the community allow for positive contributions to



local initiatives. Such contributions can be highly valuable and don't need to involve formal leadership roles. As one project lead recalled, "A school principal on the town council got forty people to attend our first event, all because of that person's credibility and ability to reach so many people. That success taught me that word of mouth is critical."

Insight #3 Unusual partnerships can lead to valuable contributions

Building relationships with a wide range of individuals and groups across the community is extremely useful. Many project leads also stressed the importance of being open to unusual partnerships. In one case, a relationship with the local coroner would have been highly valuable for advancing a local initiative. But because that didn't happen, the project lead suggested that other teams "make good friends with their coroner. They have access to timely information that would have made things so much more effective for our project. Instead, we relied on word of mouth, which is not always as efficient or reliable."

In another project, after partnering with a local principal, they were asked to provide professional development training on youth mental health in schools. Based on that collaboration, the local Roots of Hope initiative got to participate in developing national standards in suicide prevention for school boards.

A third local Roots of Hope initiative created a video on happy, healthy employees as a worthwhile investment and "secret sauce" for businesses. When bosses don't have to worry about absenteeism, they're better able to focus on their bottom line. This project was so successful that it's now being shared across the region. In turn, the project led to having a workplace mental health category added to the city's annual Biz Excellence Awards. Candidates are nominated by employees and the ceremony is sponsored by a local business.



AN EFFECTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE REQUIRES CARE

Project leads saw advisory committees as very helpful for conveying what's happening in each community, mapping existing programs, providing cultural insights, and identifying gaps. Strong advisory committees shared ownership and leadership on Roots of Hope and served as allies and ambassadors while offering relevant and timely advice.

Insight #4 Recruiting advisory committee members requires a flexible and fluid approach

In taking on the key task of recruiting advisory committee members, one project lead shared the following insight: “Don’t be afraid to ask people to join your committee or become ambassadors. It’s easier to convince them than you might think because everyone has been touched in their life by suicide in their family or community. Even though there are taboos, people are receptive when asked to get involved.” Another piece of important advice was to consider the practical needs of committee members: “Remember practical challenges like distance, time, and limited internet capacity.”

Beyond such practicalities, project leads tended to embrace one of two different approaches to recruitment: (1) more linear and structured, and (2) more fluid and iterative (i.e., constant refining and improving). Of the two, project leads saw the flexible approach as being far more effective.

Among those taking the more rigid approach, one project lead found the effort difficult, time-consuming, and at times ineffective at getting hoped-for results or taking advantage of unexpected opportunities. She felt that she “wasted a lot of time creating the committee. It changed its composition so many times in the first 18 months.”

It is critical for membership of the advisory committees to include people with lived/living experience.

Project leads that chose the more fluid method were able to use an array of highly effective strategies. One saw their approach as “fairly unique, in that it was quite comprehensive and at the same time iterative. It included focus groups with priority populations, using both interviews and surveys to gain input during the creation of the implementation strategy. Our approach was comprehensive and iterative.”

Insight #5 Leverage the role and contributions of advisory committee members

Several project leads emphasized the value of diverse advisory committees; for example, members with a broad range of experience. As one lead recommended, “It’s important to have a diverse team with different skill sets (coordination, management, research, etc.). Having a variety of champions to support the work – including from government – is critical.” A second advisory committee consisted of “stakeholders that represented diverse sectors/groups: people with lived experience, First Nations, doctors, and municipal and provincial officials.” Regardless of how they are made up, project leads recognized the important role advisory committees played, whether acting as allies, helping to identify champions, providing relevant advice, or opening doors to new opportunities.



LONG-TERM IMPACT IS IMPORTANT

The value of collaboration/coordination is deeply held by all project leads. The willingness to partner and build on existing community projects and assets is a great strength in the Roots of Hope model. As a guiding principle, it helps local initiatives avoid duplication. It also supports easier and faster sharing along with efforts to scale up good ideas and practices. That said, as one project lead reminded us, “Not everything needs to be done collaboratively. Sometimes we can learn, develop, and refine together, but in the end it might make sense to let different partners lead on implementation work individually.”

Insight #6 Take a long-term view

Several project leads emphasized that collaboration/coordination often requires a willingness to consider the impact this work has over the long term. As one of them told us, “Collaboration and partnership is about long-term support for a shift in attitudes: viewing health and well-being beyond physical health. It is about thinking comprehensively and holistically about health and well-being instead of only focusing on intervention when problems arise.”

Another reason for using this approach relates to partnerships, where it makes scaling up successful initiatives much easier. For some project leads, the long-term aspect of their initiative involved taking an “upstream” approach to fulfilling their role. One excellent example was an initiative that developed special training on suicide prevention for medical and nursing students. The hope was that doing so would “influence their practice as doctors and nurses in the future.”

Insight #7 Consider local Roots of Hope projects as a collaboration

Project leads recognized that the skills and capacities required to develop and execute a robust sustainability strategy differed from what was needed for a local Roots of Hope initiative. As a result, they identified shared learning opportunities and capacity-building supports focused on sustainability as priorities. Several project leads spoke about the value of connecting with one another in a community of practice to build relationships, improve what they were doing, and share the knowledge they had gained. As one of them said, “Sharing best practices is valuable, and it sounds like this is one of the resources that all Roots of Hope project leads will continue to have access to.”

Another emphasized that linking and coordinating the individual work of local initiatives was a key opportunity for project leads to explore, noting how she was “excited to talk about linking communities across the nation to do this work in a coordinated way.”



CONCLUSION

Collaboration/Coordination relies on and benefits from a significant investment in relationship building. The project leads we interviewed used a variety of approaches and found one-to-one conversations particularly valuable. They also discovered that, while the work of building relationships is rarely linear, it often brings unexpected benefits — especially within unusual partnerships. Advisory committees are just one way for partners to contribute and share leadership in local Roots of Hope initiatives.

Collaboration/coordination has helped many of these projects, with the positive impact of partnerships and collaborative work often extending over a long period. In acknowledging their value, several project leads singled out communities of practice and the possibility of coordinating their local efforts to generate a greater national impact.





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