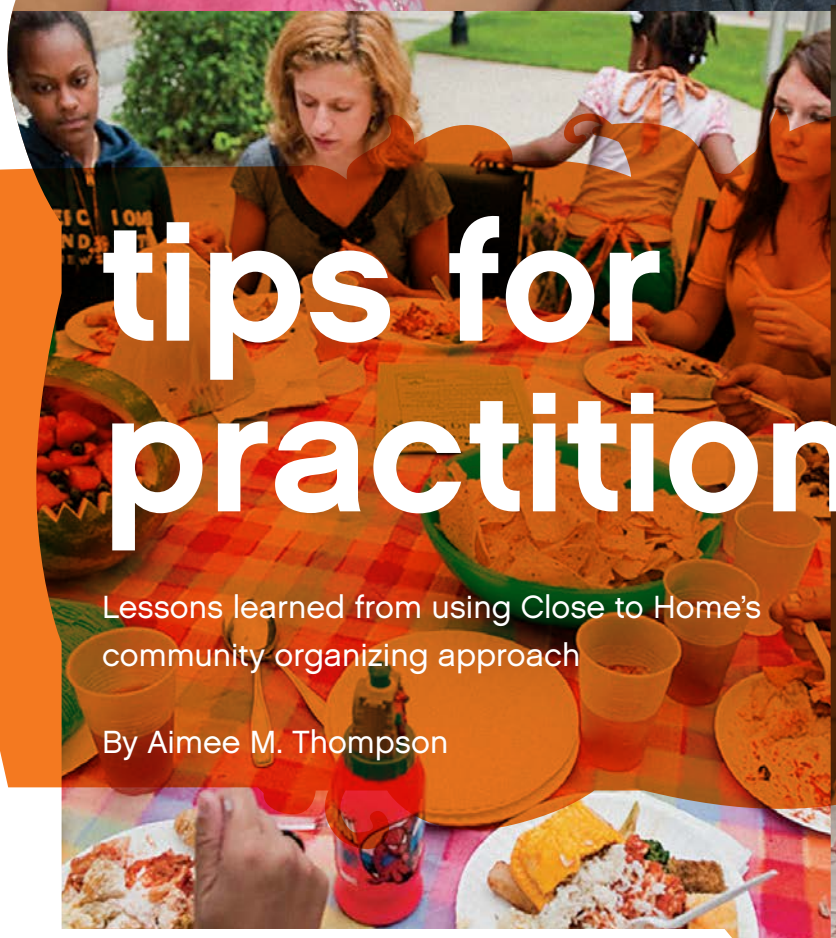

tips for practitioners

Lessons learned from using Close to Home's community organizing approach

By Aimee M. Thompson

close to home

close to home

Tips for Practitioners

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The Close to Home approach began in Dorchester, Massachusetts, United States, through the ideas, actions, and leadership of community members working in affiliation with the organization Close to Home. It continues to evolve through the leadership and experimentation of communities throughout the United States and beyond.

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introduction

Inside *this* Document

Everything in this document is intended for skilled leaders who have the resourcefulness and connections to draw on additional resources, fill gaps in knowledge, and train staff as needed. The document has been written specifically for practitioners who want a more intimate understanding of how the Close to Home approach unfolds in communities.

The contents are more conversational than instructional—like sitting down with us over a lunch to glean lessons from each phase of the approach. On the following pages, we will provide a raw and honest portrayal of the realities of this work: the common challenges and surprises, where the work can step outside the model and break the rules, and how to let the process evolve naturally within its context and through community leadership. We will share the high-level thinking, structure, and guideposts for each phase, while identifying the open and undefined spaces where an authentic and transformative journey can unfold.

The strength of the Close to Home approach is in its flexibility—maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of the work while giving it the qualities to become truly community led. The work can take on wholly different forms depending on whether it is being conducted within a rural community, urban neighborhood, or urban sprawl and depending on the issues that are important and relevant to that community. Therefore, prescriptive instructions would contradict the type of engagement and open-mindedness needed for success. The one exception is the Assess phase. Since the Assess phase is technical in its implementation, we have supplemented what you will learn here with a robust breakdown of each of its steps, along with resources and handouts (see below).

Note: *This document is a supplement to the following two documents, which are the starting point for implementation:*

- **Communities Leading Change: An overview of Close to Home's philosophy and practice for domestic and sexual violence prevention**
- **The Assess Guide: How to use action research in Close to Home's community organizing approach**

All documents are available for download at www.c2home.org.

WHO

Organizers / Organization + Network Members (youth, adults, and civic/organizational life)

1 ASSESS

gather, learn, understand

In the Assess phase, the network learns to "see" anew and becomes curious about the community—taking the time and space required to gather, learn, and understand local knowledge, including but not limited to issues of domestic and sexual violence.

2 TALK

share, define, invite

In the Talk phase, the network opens spaces for the sharing of stories and experiences. One by one, these conversations form a shared, public analysis of domestic and sexual violence and other critical issues, while deepening the vision of the change everyone wants to create. These conversations add energy and attract additional community members to the effort.

3 BUILD

envision, propose, create

In the Build phase, the network gathers yet more community members in building the teams, plans, skills, and knowledge for designing locally-driven campaigns/actions. This is the practical and detailed work of making bold ideas viable for catalyzing domestic and sexual violence prevention. All actions are tailored to the community and co-created by network members through an exchange of skills and ideas.

4 ACT

amplify, spread, advance

In the Act phase, network members engage the community in various campaigns/actions—bringing community leadership into full view and amplifying the impact of all efforts to date. This phase results in a surge of momentum, with more community members becoming curious, engaged, and ready to act, as an ongoing spirit of social change begins to take form.

YR01 YR02 YR03 YR04

The Four Phases of the **Close to Home Approach**

OUTCOMES

values, culture, priorities, structures

Stronger community connections; Increased capacity to create change, community participation, community leadership; Increased action to prevent and address domestic and sexual violence; Greater priority and attention given to domestic and sexual violence issues in community; Decreased social acceptability for domestic and sexual violence; Emergence of social norms that uphold non-violence and equity

Is *Your* Organization Ready?

Lessons Learned across Contexts

The Close to Home approach is adaptable to different contexts—urban/suburban/rural, diverse identity communities, etc. It is helpful to have a clearly defined community in which impact is sought and then to identify sub-communities to engage within that community (by age, geography, identity, etc.).

The following learnings have been consistent across contexts:

- Organizational fit is critical.
- Staff fit is critical; this approach requires skilled facilitation and self-direction.
- Ongoing and consistent technical assistance/support is useful in the early stages to support adaptation and potential paradigm shifts required to implement the approach. Over time, support can shift to peer learning networks.
- The initiating organizers/organization need to have clear role definition and to be appropriately resourced for planning and learning.
- The timeline is dependent on the initiating organizers'/organization's capacity and how often the network meets and spends time in the community (hours per week/month).
- Program launch happens more quickly when the initiating organizers/organization have high capacity in the areas listed below.

Team Characteristics of the Initiating Organizers/Organization

- Demonstrated commitment to community leadership/organizing
- Demonstrated commitment to asset/strength-based approaches
- Demonstrated commitment to violence prevention
- Deep knowledge of and connection to community, community credibility
- Access to community members (youth, adults)
- Commitment to engaging community members as leaders
- Strong relationships and credibility with local, community-based organizations
- Ability and commitment to engage in organizational change processes that may emerge as a result of organizing efforts
- Financially stable, able to direct funds to support organizing efforts
- Commitment from all levels of management to
    - embrace being in a process that may necessitate organizational transformation
    - integrate community members into organization/prevention/community work
    - attend/participate in all required activities

Individual Characteristics of the Initiating Organizers/Organization

- Interest/capacity in community organizing and social change work
- Desire to become a change agent in the community
- Interest/capacity to be a facilitator of learning and transformation
- Experience in facilitating community and youth groups, and interest/capacity regarding youth and community leadership development
- Position as a recognized informal leader in the community
- Ability to deal with controversial and complex issues
- Interest/capacity regarding gender analysis and multi-bias work

Minimum Duration and Intensity

- 3-4 years recommended for initial program implementation

The "Close to Home" Lens

In community organizing, any approach or method must be held lightly—balanced with learnings that emerge from the community itself. To use the Close to Home approach with intention yet flexibility, practitioners draw on the following constructs to create a lens through which they engage with the work. This lens guides them as they discover a new way of being and equips them for the planning and decision making along the way. It includes the following:

See the "Rationale" section of Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

The Rationale for Change

Taking on this work often involves a paradigm shift that can be both disorienting and energizing. If this is the case for you, at times you may need to return to the deeper rationale and context for making the shift and join with colleagues in reflecting upon the larger movement for change.

See the "Approach" section of Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

The Cyclical and Iterative Quality of the Phases

The Close to Home approach includes four phases, which are cycled through multiple times over three to four years, and beyond. As the work matures and gains momentum, the sequence naturally loosens, as needs and opportunities within the community inspire the network to implement some phases simultaneously and even cycle back to phases out of sequence. This flexibility allows you to respond to what arises in the community, while still being able to find yourself in the process.

See the "Mapping and Observation" section of The Assess Guide *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Always Seeing and Engaging Anew

Close to Home's iterative approach remains dynamic, because the community and context are always changing. Throughout the process, network members learn to be uniquely aware of these changes. What was provocative for the community at the start gradually feels familiar. What was unimaginable at first becomes a possibility. In this way, the community guides itself through a journey of change, always communicating what it is ready for next.

See the "Principles" section of Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

The Close to Home Principles

The Close to Home principles influence every aspect of the approach—becoming both practices and perspectives that shape the work. They are the ultimate guide when you are troubleshooting or problem solving your way through challenging times. Among your team and within the network, they can become a language for reminding each other of what you are trying to achieve and how you are trying to achieve it.

See the "Approach" section of Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

The Roles within Network Leadership and Growth

The core purpose of Close to Home's community organizing approach is to set in motion the growth of a community network that can co-create actions for domestic and sexual violence prevention. In network leadership, everyone moves in and out of different leadership roles, bringing their unique wisdom and talents to bear on the community organizing process. However, an underlying structure of roles and responsibilities still underpins network development—namely the role of the initiating organizers/organization, the role of network members recruited from the community, and how everyone comes together to act as a network.

The Assess Phase

Learning from Experience

Every week, one network member would carry the purple couch from our office out onto a nearby vacant lot. He had a giant orange thermos of lemonade, and he would just sit on this couch with his lemonade all afternoon and ask people to chat about the neighborhood. Sometimes he conducted a survey. Sometimes he'd arrange to have someone meet him on the couch for a one-on-one. Sometimes he just drank lemonade. People talked on that couch, breaking long-held silences, coming up with ideas for things the network could do. The spirit of the work was alive in that vacant lot.

Overview

What It Is

Drawing from the principles of action research and popular education, the Assess phase is when the network embarks on a deliberate and structured journey of "seeing" the community anew. The initiating organizers/organization and network members articulate what the network needs to learn, collect data through a variety of assessment methods, creatively analyze all that is discovered, and ultimately organize the outcomes to define a path for social change.

Unlike most assessments—conducted as a precursor to the process itself—here the Assess phase happens as a community and plays a central role in relationship and knowledge building. Through this process, the network gains new language, skills, insights, and values for strengthening the design and implementation of solutions.

The Assess phase also includes foundational steps that the initiating organizers/organization must take for setting up the overall approach, such as budgeting, creating documentation and evaluation systems, and making preliminary decisions about geographical boundaries.

Why It's Important

In this phase, network members engage in honoring, exploring, and documenting local knowledge—amplifying voices marginalized by services and systems being cast as the primary holders of knowledge and expertise. In the end, this phase creates the opportunity for the following:

- Thinking critically and creatively about why things are as they are and the possibilities for how things could be different
- Identifying what is powerful and effective about the community and what untapped opportunities can be built upon
- Identifying community members who can speak to the way things are, have influence, and engage others
- Deepening relationships and people's commitment to a social change process
- Gaining a nuanced understanding of the community for designing solutions that address domestic and sexual violence

What's Happening to the Network

In the initial Assess phase, the network is young and small, with primary and foundational relationships being forged. In this and future cycles of the Assess phase, the action research methodologies become powerful community organizing tools, with many of the community members who are engaged by the research (youth, adults, and/or organizational leaders) often becoming network members themselves.

[STEPS OF]

THE ASSESS PHASE

1 PREPARE FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZING.

The initiating organizers/organization establish the parameters, understanding, and operational processes and tools needed for implementing the overall approach.

2 ASSEMBLE/ ORIENT THE INITIAL NETWORK AND ASSESSMENT TEAM.

The organizers/organization recruit the initial network members. They begin orienting them to the core skills and knowledge of domestic and sexual violence prevention, while engaging interested members in becoming consistent leaders at the center of the assessment process.

3 IDENTIFY A SHARED VISION AND WHAT THE NETWORK NEEDS TO LEARN.

The network collectively defines a shared vision of the change they want to create. This vision becomes the foundation of all work and evolves with time, learnings, and network growth. With this vision in mind, the network determines what they need to learn about the community to be effective in their organizing work.

4 PLAN HOW TO FIND ANSWERS IN THE COMMUNITY.

The network determines which specific variables about the community they will need to explore to learn what they need to learn—as well as which assessment methods are best suited to exploring each of those variables.

5 USE THE ASSESSMENT METHODS.

The network uses various assessment methods for both data gathering and community organizing—including, but not limiting themselves to, mapping and observation, community surveys, and one-on-one conversations with community members.

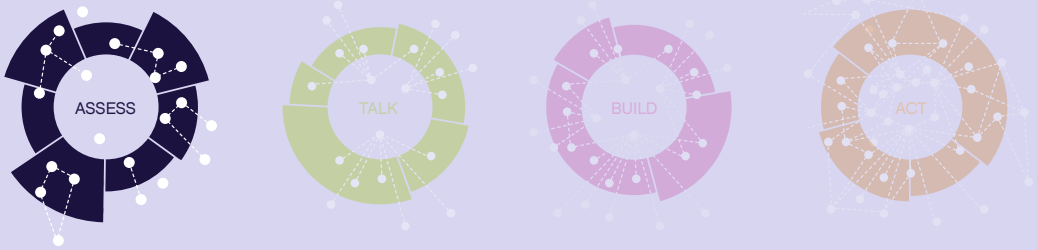
6 ANALYZE THE DATA.

The network reviews the data gathered and analyzes what they have learned about their community and how to effect change.

7 SHARE THE DATA WITH THE COMMUNITY.

The network engages with the community to review the data further, facilitating critical conversations and analysis for deepening and advancing the organizing efforts.

A GROWING **NETWORK**



Foundations *for* Implementation

Since the Assess phase is technical in its implementation, a full breakdown of its steps can be found in The Assess Guide: How to use action research in Close to Home's community organizing approach *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Pacing and Timing

Time needed – The Assess phase typically spans approximately three to six months. However, keep in mind that this can vary greatly depending on the number of people and teams sharing the work, how often they meet, and how much time they have for moving the work forward.

Throughout the phase – The research benefits from variety, from being out in the community and gathering data on different days of the week and at different times of day. MOST IMPORTANTLY, this phase is a critical time for getting to know the community's natural rhythms so that you can pace the entire process accordingly—leveraging and respecting the slow times, the busy times, annual parades and celebrations, the influences of weather on community life, etc.

Throughout the process – Return to all/part of the Assess phase when you cycle back through the phases and whenever you need answers to deepen your efforts. Throughout the process, continue one-on-ones and bring the awareness and ways of seeing practiced in Assess forward into other phases.

Note: *See the "Approach" section of Communities Leading Change for an overview of the pacing and timing of the entire Close to Home process (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Core Skills and Knowledge

The integrity of the entire process depends on the ongoing development of core skills and knowledge. Over time, the network as a whole will need to establish a shared analysis of the root causes of violence, healthy relationship skills, proactive bystander skills, leadership skills, and community organizing skills (e.g., public speaking, event planning, group facilitation, etc.). Ideally these are introduced and reviewed throughout the approach, in an informal and iterative way. If this is not possible, then more formal workshops can be conducted with key network members at the outset, and then annually or semiannually.

Whatever style/strategy you choose, developing core skills and knowledge should start immediately. The Assess phase is about having a vision, seeing in a new way, and challenging assumptions and the status quo. Based on this, prioritize building core skills and knowledge in the following ways:

- Start with yourselves. Ensure everyone on your team has the time and support to reflect on an analysis of the root causes of violence, prevention, the Close to Home principles, their own vision for change, and how they can create change in their own lives.
- Use these experiences to guide how you want to facilitate similar self-discovery through network activities and through how you engage new network members.
- Alongside network members, build your action research skills (i.e., data collection, cataloguing, and analysis) as well as event planning skills for sharing your findings with the community.

Note: *To contextualize this within the overall process, see Step 2 in* The Assess Guide *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Relationship Building

Don't be put off by the technical nature of this phase. It's an opportunity for getting to know people, starting conversations, and seeing new possibilities for building relationships in the community. Model a spirit of storytelling, food, and togetherness right from the beginning, ensuring that you are building and strengthening relationships throughout your action research, not only in the community but also with each other.

Documentation and Evaluation

You will want to prioritize creating consistent documentation and evaluation systems right from the start. Despite the temptation to put this off amid the rigors of action research, you will be grateful if you lay this foundation now. Also, don't forget that now is an important opportunity to collect baseline data if you hope to collect impact data at the end.

Note: *You will find some specific suggestions for documentation and evaluation in Step 1 of The Assess Guide (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Principles

It is important to practice all nine Close to Home principles throughout the process. However, to deepen practice, consider paying particular attention to a few key principles during each phase. During the Assess phase, we recommend staying grounded in the following:

- **A Fierce Commitment to Community** – ensuring you start by believing in the power of community to lead and shape solutions.
- **Community Assets and Strengths** – looking at how the various research methods can engage what is already powerful in the community to prevent domestic and sexual violence.
- **For All Social Change** — holding a broad lens so that you notice connections between domestic and sexual violence and other key issues in the community.
- **Whole Community Engagement** — discovering the opportunities for engaging a range and mix of community members.

Note: *You can find full descriptions of all nine Close to Home principles in the document* Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Messy Truths

This is the phase that most people want to skip—either because it feels too technical, because they feel like they already know the community, because they want to move right to "action," or all three. If the "research" aspect intimidates or bores you, relax in knowing that there is a whole guide to walk you through the process in a fairly easygoing way (see *The Assess Guide* at www.c2home.org). If your team dislikes the idea of being out in the community conducting a survey, remind them that there are other support roles they can play. If you think you already know your community, think again—there is far more to discover! MOST IMPORTANTLY, until you learn to see what you've never noticed before, you cannot fully break open the potential of this process. It is through this experience that your team builds a critical new way of seeing and engaging with the community.

Outcomes

If you move through the steps of this phase in alignment with the Close to Home principles, you should finish by achieving the following outcomes toward realizing the shared vision in the community:

Within the Network

- Network members evaluating and shifting their own values and behaviors, and creating change in their own lives and social networks
- New culture for observing and engaging with the community
- Increase in fundamental community organizing skills
- Physical map of the community
- Indexes of key assets and resources
- List of informal/formal community leaders
- Insights into what you need to know about the community for community organizing:
    - Who works/lives in the community, common identities, etc.
    - What would motivate and/or prevent community members from getting involved in domestic and sexual violence prevention
    - Strengths and assets that can be used for community organizing
    - Current attitudes and actions related to domestic and sexual violence

Beyond the Network

- Increased conversations about domestic and sexual violence and other related issues, amplifying community voices and perspectives
- Repeated visibility of network members, reinforcing domestic and sexual violence as community issues
- More and deeper relationships with potential allies

Big Questions *and* Real Answers

Why engage youth?

The Close to Home approach calls for engaging three constituencies: youth, adults, and civic/organizational life. Youth are the critical component for making the work intergenerational, which makes it more effective in shifting social norms and addressing cycles of violence. It is often the tendency to separate youth engagement from community organizing, whereas the Close to Home principles work to bring everyone together. Young people are engaged as leaders in creating solutions within a community-wide effort. Engaging youth requires flexibility, authenticity, trust, and fun. It requires putting an end to adultism—the marginalizing and patronizing of youth—and collaborating with youth as experts and equal partners. It depends on letting youth engage based on their passions and interests—be that spoken word or krumping. By doing all of this, we create spaces in which youth, and any other network members, can challenge the dominant culture and redefine it. At the foundation of it all, youth remind us to stay open to whatever gets people in the door. While for some it may be an interest in preventing domestic and sexual violence, for others it could be boredom, the relief of air conditioning, or an opportunity to hang out with friends. And that's just fine!

How do you identify informal community leaders?

Informal community leaders are your first source of community insights. You are likely to find them in natural gathering/congregate settings within the community—on a front porch, at a local park, or maybe in the coffee shop they operate. In some cases it might be obvious who they are; in other cases it will become clear only once you get to know people. Ultimately, you can recognize informal community leaders by the following characteristics:

- They are mentioned in conversation by many others.
- They have influence in their peer group.
- They play a formal or informal convening role amongst their social network (i.e., leading a community group, initiating gatherings of friends, etc.).
- They are willing to recommend and connect you to other people you should talk with.
- They are protective of and hopeful for the community.

Note: *See "Mapping and Observation" in Step 5 of The Assess Guide to learn more about discovering/rediscovering the community (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

How do you engage men and boys in the effort?

The Close to Home approach is grounded in the principle of "whole community engagement." Domestic and sexual violence are community issues that affect everyone, and everyone is needed to change the social norms that are their root causes. Thus, prevention includes engaging men and boys. As with youth, Close to Home's perspective is that it is important to engage men and boys in the context of the network and the broader community, rather than separating out a specific men's engagement strategy. There are men and boys who don't use violence and who have seen wives, aunts, mothers, and sisters hurt by violence. Many are looking for an opportunity to take action. Others may get involved because of their interest in community change. In all cases, engaging men and boys is critical for connecting other men and boys to the growing network and to actions for changing social norms.

As the network evolves, stay true to a popular education approach, enabling personal reflection and dialogue about dominant male culture. Create spaces where men and boys can be who they are and grow in each other's presence, alongside women and girls, and in a gender-inclusive community. At the same time, pay attention to the gender and power dynamics within the network that evolve between women and men, encouraging network members to resolve inequities and challenge dominant culture together.

How do you prepare for people within the network using/experiencing violence?

Violence can happen in anyone's life and in any space—and the network is no exception. In anticipation of people in the network experiencing violence, organize internal procedures and relationships with appropriate agencies to ensure your organization upholds its legal and ethical responsibilities as a potential mandated reporter of violence (i.e., of child abuse and neglect or other forms of violence). Also, beyond these responsibilities, determine how involved the network will become in supporting individuals in crisis, while ensuring the scope of this role is sustainable. Make sure network members are aware of these roles and legal responsibilities so that they can make choices about what they share.

As for someone in the group using violence, everyone within the network goes through their own journey of learning and discovery, and sometimes this includes realizing how they themselves have been abusing power and using control in their personal relationships—as a partner, parent, or in other roles in their lives. Typically, this inspires them to transform this reality, which is a desired outcome of the work. While welcoming this journey without judgment, foster a transparent and trusting relationship with all network members. If you find

yourself in a situation that requires you to report a network member, access appropriate supports, assess the safety of the situation and, if possible and appropriate, try to do the reporting in partnership with the network member and in a supportive manner.

Unfortunately, some staff or network members may use violence against and/or power over others in the network. Have policies and procedures that will support you in acting swiftly and consistently, without prejudice or favoritism, in these situations.

***Note**: To contextualize this within the overall process, see Step 1 of* The Assess Guide *(download PDF at http://www.c2home.org). Also, consider seeking other resources and support for preparing for such circumstances.*

How do you move beyond individual leadership to dynamic, emergent, co-creative leadership?

The network exists to build community and create social change. Everything and everyone is a small piece of something bigger that is enabling community members to lead change in their own lives, and with each other. Shared leadership and this commitment to community will need to be modeled and practiced first and always within the network. This means redefining leadership from "you follow me" to "let's see what emerges in the space between us, in our relationships, our ideas, and our collective creativity." This shift in practice around leadership extends, with the network, into the broader community as community members are engaged in seeing themselves as part of the vision and leading solutions.

***Note**: See the "Introduction" and "Approach" sections of Communities Leading Change for more information on network leadership (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

YMS

The Talk Phase

Learning from Experience

It wasn't long before we learned that great things happen over steaming lasagna. When we gathered friends and neighbors around home-cooked foods—with playfulness, thoughtfulness, and openness—to talk about domestic and sexual violence in the community, eventually someone would say, "this happened to me" or "this happened to my sister." Sometimes their best friend beside them didn't even know, but somehow having this dedicated space and time to talk, the complete lack of judgment, the sense of comfort and care, the pure fact that people showed up for the conversation, it all suddenly made everyone feel less alone and able to let go. By asking raw and real questions like, "What do you think?" and "What is possible?" a new kind of conversation would emerge. One truth would lead to more truths, one idea would lead to more ideas, with people eventually saying, "we have to do something about this."

Overview

What It Is

The Talk phase is when the network calls on more community members to expand and deepen the conversations of the Assess phase. Everyone engages in critical and creative thinking related to domestic and sexual violence and other community issues, in time identifying priorities and shaping solutions. Every dialogue honors and meets community members wherever they are on their own path to prevention and leadership—welcoming, with openness, all backgrounds and ideas, while also focusing the discussion on issues of domestic and sexual violence. By engaging community members as experts in their experiences and communities, and by moving through potentially challenging conversations with determination, grace, and skill, the network reinforces its fierce commitment to the community's collective power and capacity to lead change.

Why It's Important

Through the Talk phase, the network lays the foundation for the process to be truly community generated and led, gathering the critical mass of support needed for social change. In the end, this phase creates the opportunities for the following:

- Recruiting more people and organizations into the organizing process
- Making more "public" the narrative about prevention and community change
- Nurturing more dialogue and relationship building between community members
- Gathering further insight into where people are on key issues
- Expanding the scope and depth of critical and creative thinking

***Note**: The "Talk" phase is not training, public awareness, or a series of presentations. Rather, it is a time to be together as community members—to tell stories, listen, learn, and inquire. This phase is a distinct example of taking an "organizing" stance rather than a "training" or "awareness-raising" stance.*

What's Happening to the Network

The Talk phase is when the network expands and deepens its membership—drawing in multiple perspectives to increase the opportunities for innovation. Through social gatherings, dialogues, and collective analysis, community leadership becomes more visible. As energy and voices build, the network hones which issues and solutions to self-organize around in the Build and Act phases.

1

IDENTIFY SPACES FOR GROWING THE CONVERSATION. The emerging network uses the information gathered during the Assess phase to identify individuals/groups that are central to community life (e.g., an informal leader among neighbors, the youth passionate about engaging her peers, the community meeting where key decisions are made). They recruit these formal and informal leaders to co-host conversations with their own social networks.

2

DESIGN CONVERSATIONS TO SUIT EACH SPACE. Each individual/group identified works with one or two network members to design a conversational gathering that is engaging, creative, and fitting with their role in the community. These gatherings could include kitchen table conversations, workshops for creating digital stories, impromptu conversations at public gatherings, and more.

3

FACILITATE A CULTURE OF AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE. In preparing for these conversations, network members explore with the host individuals/groups how to foster authenticity and relationship building within these gatherings. Making conversations fun, being prepared for disclosure, emphasizing that there are no right or wrong answers, and fostering a creative and aspirational experience are examples of ways to gather people with such a spirit.

4

ENGAGE AND LET THE CONVERSATIONS UNFOLD. Network members attend and support the gatherings, ensuring all are abundant with food and laughter and a celebration of one another. Each gathering engages community members as experts in their experiences of community and with violence. Everyone participates in the culture of authentic dialogue just described for conversations that are enjoyable, generative, and meaningful.

5

MAKE CONNECTIONS AND ANALYZE FINDINGS. In the spirit of community organizing, network members at each gathering connect with and recruit community members who express an interest in being further engaged in subsequent steps of the organizing process. Network members then gather to look for cross-cutting themes from all the conversations and compare these to the data analysis of the Assess phase.

A GROWING **NETWORK**

Foundations *for* Implementation

Pacing and Timing

Time needed – The Talk phase typically spans approximately two to four months. However, keep in mind that this can vary greatly depending on the number of people and teams sharing the work, how often they meet, and how much time they have for moving the work forward.

Throughout the phase – The number of conversations that you co-host with community members is based on your capacity to not only make thoughtful preparations but also follow up with those who attend—since this next level of engagement is where the community organizing process begins to get increased buy-in and traction.

Throughout the process – Return to the Talk phase when you cycle back through the phases or whenever the network needs to expand its reach and deepen engagement. When you move on to other phases, some conversations will continue as regular events within the community, such as network members holding a consistent spot on the agenda of a public meeting or organizing informal peer gatherings on a monthly basis.

***Note**: See the "Approach" section of* Communities Leading Change *for an overview of the pacing and timing of the entire Close to Home process (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Core Skills and Knowledge

This phase is all about learning what people think and engaging community members in dialogue and storytelling to bring issues of domestic and sexual violence into public spaces. Based on this, focus on supporting the network members who will facilitate community conversations, particularly as they do the following:

- Learn and practice ways to introduce the network, its purpose, and its activities
- Practice how to maintain an open listening stance and probe with "Why?"
- Become clear on their own ideas and how these align with the network, so that they can answer clarifying questions about domestic and sexual violence facts and manage inquiries into their own opinion
- Practice skills for redirecting the conversation back to the group, such as by asking, "what do you think?"

Relationship Building

In this phase, the work moves to the second layer of the Ecological Model, by engaging people's social networks, and then those people engaging their social networks, and so on. In the various community gatherings, people come together in thoughtful and welcoming spaces full of fun and food. Relationship building often culminates in truth telling—when longtime friends and neighbors share more openly than ever before, and together feel more connected and more motivated to "do something."

Documentation and Evaluation

You will want to ensure that there is a sign-in sheet at all community gatherings and a chance for folks to sign up for network updates or for getting involved. Also, network members who are co-hosting conversations should take copious notes on flip charts throughout the conversations, and then type these up afterward and include them in an activity report. This raw data can be really helpful. It should be coded in the same way as assessment data—noting cross-cutting themes that emerge—and then added to and compared to all that was learned in the Assess phase. This type of analysis will provide strategy and direction for the campaigns/actions in the Build phase. Along with these notes, activity reports should include a list of people to follow up with, lessons learned for other gatherings, and new insights for the network as a whole.

***Note**: See Step 6 in* The Assess Guide *for more information on analyzing notes and identifying themes (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Messy Truths

Talking and truth telling can feel so good that many people often want to stay in this phase. In some communities, it may make sense to create some ongoing spaces where people can connect through conversation (e.g., knitting groups, reading groups, parenting groups, etc.) However, beware of getting stuck in this phase and all its comforts, and be sure to move toward more explicit forms of community action.

Principles

It is important to practice all nine Close to Home principles throughout the process. However, to deepen practice, consider paying particular attention to a few key principles during each phase. During the Talk phase, we recommend staying grounded in the following:

- **Powerful Relationships** — creating a space for truth telling and for connecting through authenticity.
- **Beloved Community** – fostering a spirit of laughter, play, joy, and love, while making room for fear, shame, sadness, and conflict without judgment.
- **Creative Action** – encouraging community members to imagine solutions and think creatively about pathways to action and change.
- **Patience and Persistence** – creating space for perspectives and social norms to rub together, surfacing what people really think and digging in for the deep work.

***Note**: You can find full descriptions of all nine Close to Home principles in the document* Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Outcomes

If you move through the steps of this phase in alignment with the Close to Home principles, you should finish by achieving the following outcomes toward realizing the shared vision in the community:

Within the Network

- Network members evaluating and shifting their own values and behaviors, and creating change in their own lives and social networks
- Broader intersectional understanding/awareness of community issues, in particular those related to domestic and sexual violence
- Increased leadership, organizing, and facilitating skills among network members
- List of key issues and themes to compare with and add to those of the Assess phase

Beyond the Network

- Increased public conversations and analysis about domestic and sexual violence, exploring the issues and solutions in greater depth
- Increased relationships and feeling of community between community members
- Sense of shared power and motivation for creating change
- More community organizations and civic institutions addressing domestic and sexual violence as a priority
- New community members and organizational partners recruited into the organizing process

Big Questions *and* Real Answers

Which informal/formal community leaders are best for co-hosting community conversations?

In Step 1 of the Talk phase, you will be looking for the individuals/groups who can co-host community conversations—whether that's an informal gathering or bringing the issue to a public meeting. Looking back at the Assess data, identify people who have some or all of the following:

- A motivation to be involved
- Existing role as a formal or informal convener in the community
- Willingness to convene their social network

Some people will be independent individuals within the community, whereas others may be affiliated with a local organization. Some will be obvious choices, whereas others will be less obvious. Think creatively and intuitively. Do not make assumptions about where rich conversations could unfold. Focus on choosing a mix of individuals to engage the broadest possible cross-section of the community.

What are the dos and don'ts for designing community conversations?

In Step 2 of the Talk phase, you will be working with community members to design the gathering that best suits their network, their role in the community, and the available space. Here are some details on the most effective options:

Kitchen Table Conversations are when friends and neighbors gather in someone's backyards, in a local park, or around a kitchen table for a facilitated, fun, and informal sharing of experiences and perspectives.

Do

- Use whatever name works for the gathering (youth have called these "ice cream socials").
- Have mouthwatering and plentiful food.
- Make it easy to attend (e.g., organize transportation and/or childcare).
- Speak broadly about community change, framing this as a community issue. At the same time, welcome personal truth telling, creating working agreements at the outset for confidentiality around what unfolds.
- Have an activity for people to do when they arrive (e.g., create something with Jenga blocks to represent your thoughts on domestic and sexual violence).

- Remember that people want to talk; they want to be asked, "What do you think?" Start and sustain the conversation with some open-ended questions (e.g., What do you think about when you hear the words domestic and sexual violence?, Where did you learn about these issues?, What would you do if you heard violence next door? What can we do to prevent violence in our community?). Probe the answers with the question, "Why?" (this is a skill network members will have learned during the action research of the Assess phase).
- Finish with an activity that allows people to speak from a position of power (e.g., Pass around a crown and ask people to say what they would do to end violence if they were king/queen for the day.)
- Take copious notes on flip charts throughout the conversations, and then type these up afterward and include them in an activity report.

Don't

- Don't ask personal questions and force disclosure.
- Don't let one or two people dominate the conversation.
- Don't talk more than you listen.

Public Meetings and Spaces allow you to create a presence and start a conversation in a public forum—such as a town-hall style gathering, faith-based gathering, business association meeting, or youth/community event—where there may have otherwise been silence around issues of domestic and sexual violence.

Do

- Choose meetings where community decision-making happens, where elected officials or other recognized leaders have a presence, and/or where the outcomes of the meeting speak to and influence social norms and possibilities within the community.
- Take whatever space you are given on the agenda with gratitude. It may only be five or ten minutes.
- Talk about the network's activities and the bigger vision of community building.
- Share concrete actions/ways people can get involved to prevent violence.
- Keep your tone conversational and positive, while creating a space for asking questions.
- Come again and again until people expect it, wait for it, and value it.
- Find allies within that group who can move the conversation forward.
- Take notes and track conversations to help shape the direction of change in this particular meeting or space.

Don't

- Don't overwhelm people with scary statistics.
- Don't threaten people to take action.
- Don't expect to attend a meeting only once and have an impact.

Art and Storytelling is about engaging people in creating artifacts (e.g., digital stories, poetry, monologues, and skits) that serve the dual purpose of giving community members a voice and producing resources for the process (i.e., for other conversations in the Talk phase as well as for future campaigns/action).

Do

- Work with interested network members to determine the goals, focus, and medium of the art/storytelling project you will undertake, and to define the process for completion (e.g., a three-day workshop or weekly meetings over a number of weeks).
- Brainstorm creative ideas for how to work with various art forms. Then provide the tools, skills, and parameters for creating the art/artifact.
- Provide support as people grapple with the potential challenges of storytelling about domestic and sexual violence.
- Allow sufficient time for creating the art/artifact, sharing it with each other, and celebrating the work completed—using food and a spirit of play to foster relationship building throughout it all.
- Work with participating community members to determine how to use the art in the community.

Don't

- Don't differentiate between good and bad art.
- Don't rush people's personal process.
- Don't pressure people into personal disclosures.

What if people say things that others disagree with?

In this and later phases, people's ideas will rub up against each other, and this is okay. In the community conversations that make up this phase, people may say things that you and others don't agree with. They may think change isn't possible, and act defeatist and discouraging. They may hold political positions contrary to others in the group, provoking lively debate. These are times for surfacing social norms and letting them shape and challenge each other. That said, subtle interventions can keep the conversation on track and

the energy positive. Above all, when tensions rise or if people make inappropriate remarks, the facilitator should provide leadership, and redirect the group to their working agreements to ensure a comfortable and productive environment. While normal and expected, managing such moments can be wearing and unnerving. Be sure to debrief regularly throughout this phase and support network members in processing what is challenging and frustrating.

What if people go completely and passionately off topic?

In these conversations, all matter of community concerns may be raised (e.g., traffic congestion, current politics, police brutality). With Close to Home's intersectional stance, many issues can be another entry point to discussing the social norms that lead to domestic and sexual violence. Other issues of concern may be completely unrelated yet provide more familiar topics for easing people into the moment. Letting the conversation meander is fine, but if a tangent goes on for more than a few minutes, try to refocus the group.

Also, be prepared for community members wanting to explore strategies for responding to active violence. While this may seem off topic—distracting from a focus on prevention—this is still within the scope of the process, and for many it is the ideal starting point for moving toward action (see related resources at www.c2home.org). If there is a lot of energy toward an idea that seems outside the scope of the network's purview, engage other organizations or groups in the community that have the appropriate resources and connections for moving those ideas forward. If the conversation surfaces biases, such as homophobia and racism, opposite to the values of the Close to Home approach, be prepared to step in with facilitation that addresses the bias and redirects the conversation to one of respect and an intersectional analysis.

How do you prepare for the needed self-care?

Throughout the entire process and in this phase in particular, you and your team will become deeply aware of, and potentially close to, the extent of violence unfolding in the community on a daily basis. To remain healthy and effective in the work, it is important to have spaces and processes in place to support the team in making sense of this experience. If you have not already done so, we recommend allocating time and budget for self-care, including bringing in a clinical supervisor on a regular basis to debrief experiences with your team (continuing this throughout the process). In addition, it is important to monitor the network as a whole and create pauses for reflection and recharging. Be ready to interrupt activities to discuss experiences and incidents that arise—whether in a formal meeting space, small groups, or one-on-one conversations.

The Build Phase

Learning from Experience

Once, a project team wanted to advertise a fake "Topless Car Wash" and shame whoever showed up—an idea contrary to the Close to Home principles and ethics of the initiating organization and affiliated school and public health department. So the project team was engaged in a conversation for thinking through the implications, which inspired them to modify the idea with impressive creativity. In the end, those who arrived at the "Topless Car Wash," would get the top of their car washed in exchange for a conversation about their role in violence prevention.

Another group once wanted to paint a giant mural on a subway station wall. The idea seemed to include very little active community engagement. But they disagreed, and the project wasn't going to do any harm, so we stepped back and let it unfold. The results were amazing, with the engagement of the transit authority, the mayor's office, and even the governor. The mural was also used to prompt conversations between network members and commuters as they walked to and from the train. In the end, we were happily wrong in our assumptions.

Overview

What It Is

The Build phase is the time to prepare for action. In this phase, the network—now larger and growing—develops interconnected strategies and initiatives for catalyzing social norm change. Relationships deepen and energy builds, as the network self-organizes into project teams—harnessing the learning, conversations, and momentum from the first two phases to inspire creativity and inform decision making. Each team designs campaigns/actions—both peer-driven and intergenerational—based on where they feel they can have the most influence. They then go on to build the plans, skills, and knowledge for bringing those ideas to fruition.

Why It's Important

As teams create and experiment together to design their campaigns/actions, the network begins to innovate and feel the synergistic strength of the whole. Network members of all backgrounds contribute their talents to the effort—either through providing training or, more often, through supporting others in learning by doing. Everyone has the opportunity to become a learner again to acquire the knowledge and skills for implementing their ideas. Through it all, people are collaborating and sharing leadership, all to advance a vision they now hold deeply.

What's Happening to the Network

In the Build phase, the opportunities for participation in the network become more extensive and personalized, as network members engage in project teams that align with their interests and skills. People's strengths and talents are called upon more and more often. The cross-pollination of expertise expands as other community members are drawn in to provide needed knowledge and skills, often becoming network members themselves.

1

EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES FOR CATALYZING SOCIAL CHANGE. The network gathers to reiterate and reaffirm the analysis, solutions, and shared vision that emerged in the first two phases, and based on that determines some viable social change opportunities.

2

DESIGN CAMPAIGNS/ ACTIONS FOR ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY. Network members collectively generate out-of-the-box solutions that can both effect change and bring more people into the conversation and network. Once a few strong ideas are identified, project teams form based on shared areas of interest. Examples of potential initiatives include norms change campaigns; community arts projects such as murals, theater, and spoken word; campaigns linking domestic and sexual violence to other issues; community events; etc.—all implemented in coordination for a synergistic effect.

[STEPS OF]

THE **BUILD** PHASE

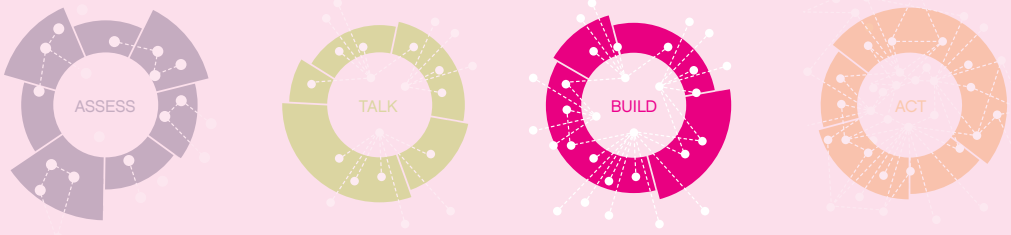
4

FACILITATE SKILL BUILDING FOR SPECIFIC CAMPAIGNS/ACTIONS. Project teams identify the needed specialists or content experts (often community and network members themselves) who can train people in the specific skills needed to implement their ideas. This could include training in campaign planning, social marketing, graphic design, script development, poetry workshops, etc. Project-specific training honors knowledge sharing in all directions and follows best practices in adult education and youth development.

3

SUPPORT PROJECT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT. Network members, with the time and interest, step into leadership roles within the project teams to provide support in setting up a meeting schedule as well as project goals and priorities. As needed, they work with the network organizers/organization to help arrange opportunities to grow skills in areas such as team building and project management.

A GROWING **NETWORK**



Foundations *for* Implementation

Pacing and Timing

Time needed – The Build phase typically spans approximately three months—or longer if achieving smaller benchmarks along the way. However, keep in mind that this can vary greatly depending on the number of people and teams sharing the work, how often they meet, and how much time they have for moving the work forward.

Throughout the phase – Pace yourselves so that you create sufficient readiness for the Act phase without burning out before you get there, always keeping your mind on the Act phase and beyond. Your impact depends on having the energy and creativity to seize all the spontaneous opportunities that arise from the campaigns/actions once they are unfolding in the community.

Throughout the process – Return to the Build phase when you cycle back through the phases and whenever you are ready to develop a new idea for deepening social change. While there is a marked increase in skills and knowledge building during this phase, remember that developing core skills and knowledge within the network (e.g., leadership skills and community organizing skills) is an activity that extends throughout the process.

Note: *See the "Approach" section of* Communities Leading Change *for an overview of the-pacing and timing of the entire Close to Home process (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Core Skills and Knowledge

The priority in this phase is to ensure that network members deepen their analysis of the issues and feel equipped to design campaigns/actions as part of the solution. Based on this, prioritize building core skills and knowledge in the following ways:

- Consider organizing some collective learning before breaking into project teams.
- Check in regularly with project teams to assess where additional learning is needed.
- Integrate skills and knowledge sharing into the work itself.
- When there is a need for new project-specific skills, look first within the net-work for someone who can share these with the group, and otherwise use the opportunity for introducing new people to the network.

Relationship Building

Project team meetings should be designed around building connections with one another—with icebreakers, check-ins, food, time for talking about what's going on in the world, and for considering how that connects to the work. By this point in the process, everyone will have an elevated awareness of how local and global news reflect the social norms perpetuating domestic and sexual violence in the community. The Build phase should create space for this deeper level of conversation and analysis, while continuing to drive toward action.

Documentation and Evaluation

You will want to track the activities of all the project teams. If there is no one from your organization on a project team, identify someone in the group who would like this leadership role. Organize consistent reporting/debriefing routines, including a sign-up sheet for each meeting, an activity log of what was accomplished, and a list of the intended next steps. Collect and review this information regularly, using it as a starting point for engaging with each team in thinking critically about their progress and any additional support needed. Reporting and debriefing processes are also useful for sharing lessons learned between project teams to leverage learnings across the network.

Messy Truths

Keep in mind that network members have been living with the same social norms they are seeking to change. As network members become more comfortable with one another and begin to work together with greater intensity, subtle or overt biases may emerge that were not evident before, including homophobia, sexism, racism, and adultism. Intervene with skilled facilitation when issues arise in relation to the values and intersectional analysis underlying the approach. Have critical conversations with individuals and/or create a space to process challenging dynamics as a group. With each cycle of the approach, the network will deepen its culture and capacity for handling these situations, helping people join, real and raw, in beloved community to talk through differences and about the values and beliefs that will drive the work forward.

Principles

It is important to practice all nine Close to Home principles throughout the process. However, to deepen practice, consider paying particular attention to a few key principles during each phase. During the Build phase, we recommend staying grounded in the following:

- **Network Leadership** — leveraging strengths and engaging network members in co-creating and learning together.
- **For All Social Change** —animating the intersectional analysis emerging from campaigns/actions.
- **Creative Action** – practicing living into the vision and keeping the work propositional and fun.

Note: *You can find full descriptions of all nine Close to Home principles in the document* Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Outcomes

If you move through the steps of this phase in alignment with the Close to Home principles, you should finish by achieving the following outcomes toward realizing the shared vision in the community:

Within the Network

- Network members evaluating and shifting their own values and behaviors, and creating change in their own lives and social networks
- Increased structure and role definition
- Increased focus on solutions, creating a surge of energy and creativity
- Deepening knowledge and analysis of domestic and sexual violence
- Greater sense of beloved community between network members as a result of increased accountability to each other
- Increased leadership, project management, and project-specific skills among network members

Beyond the Network

- Conversations and relationships (started during the Assess and Talk phases) evolved through strategic ongoing network activities, laying the foundation for campaigns/actions in the Act phase
- New community members and organizational partners recruited into the network through project-specific needs

Big Questions *and* Real Answers

How do you create a culture of learning by doing?

A culture of learning by doing depends on network members feeling the freedom and invitation to lead, experiment, and fail. At the start of the Build phase, it may be helpful to set two clear expectations:

1. The initiating organizers/organization will not be doing all the planning and then delegating to network members. Rather the network members, in their project teams, will be planning and delegating amongst themselves and calling for support as needed.
2. Experimentation, set backs, and failures are part of this creative process. Project teams are not expected to train in all the needed skills in advance, but rather to dig in and learn along the way.

When these expectations are clear, it is then upon you to model and reinforce them by letting go of control, embracing imperfections, and taking moments to pause, ask questions, and have conversations that help network members feel their leadership in the process.

How do you foster a creative process while also managing "crazy" ideas?

"Crazy" ideas for campaigns/actions can be a sign of confidence and creativity within the network, and thus should not be feared. However, network leadership does not mean that the initiating organizers/organization relinquish all control. You are still playing an oversight role in maintaining the integrity of the work. By this point in the process, the network will have built up a culture of critical thinking, analysis, and open conversation. Using all three, you can engage the network in unpacking any "crazy" ideas with questions such as, "How could this idea help us realize our shared vision?", "How does it respond to what we learned in the Assess and Talk phases?", "How does it align with the Close to Home principles?" Through such questions and some nonjudgmental, active listening, the resulting discussion will likely lead to one of the following:

- It becomes clear that network members are following inspired community insights. This is the power of a community-led process and requires some humility on the part of the initiating organizers/organization.
- It becomes clear that the group's creativity got off track. Through nonjudgmental, collective critical thinking, new insights guide the group in how to redesign the idea accordingly.

- Network members feel passionate about moving ahead with the idea as is, despite your questions and concerns. If there are no ethical or legal issues, no harm that could come of it, put trust in the idea. Sometimes network members' best instincts and insights are not obvious until the initiative has come to life in the community. If there are ethical or legal concerns, pause the work, organize some core skills and knowledge development, and then support the group in revisiting and redesigning the idea as needed.

How do you maximize participation from across the network?

The Build phase is the time to broaden and diversify participation. Through the Asses and Talk phases you will have gathered many insights about the skills various people can bring to the effort. Now, through the design of campaigns/actions, you can invite people to play roles most aligned with their interests, passions, and availability—creating pathways for more extensive learning and sharing. The goal is to facilitate maximum participation across a flexible engagement latter—with some network members taking on key leadership roles, others playing support roles, and everyone being equally respected and valued. Also, this phase offers many opportunities for different parts of the network to connect with each other—by having project teams be sounding boards for each other, organizing shared training sessions, and more.

Note: *See the "Introduction" and "Approach" sections of* Communities Leading Change *for more about the concept of network building (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

How do you manage challenging interpersonal/ group dynamics?

In this phase, the honeymoon of group dynamics typically comes to an end, as project team members become more accountable to each other, divide project responsibilities, and work through creative differences. Common challenges could include differences in opinion related to strategy, network members skipping or being late for meetings, and people discovering that others in their group hold staunchly different political views.

The principles of "beloved community" and "powerful relationships" are about calling each other on our stuff. They are about holding each other in all of who we are and taking the risks of having the hard conversations. You can put this explicitly on the table as a starting point for engaging network members, privately or in small groups, to resolve conflicts with your mediation if needed. Creating moments for self-care and reflection can also support teams in remembering the normalcy of such dynamics. Ultimately, by turning people's mind to the shared vision, you can typically engage people in finding amicable solutions in the name of being accountable to the process and each other.

How do you ensure the work sustains the spirit and power of community organizing?

Moving into this more practical planning phase can at times cause network members to lose touch with the Close to Home principles and spirit of community organizing. Project teams may default to designing more passive awareness-raising initiatives, rather than something that engages community members in taking action and changing social norms. Similarly, they may default to envisioning protests and vigils filled with messages of blame, fear, and negativity, rather than creating experiences filled with fun and a sense of possibility. The campaigns/actions they create should engage the community in living the desired change, starting now. The goal is to design initiatives that will put a smile on people's face—giving them hope and inspiring them into action. Keeping this in mind, you can provide the following support to project teams:

- Guide teams in identifying how their campaign/action will engage community members in living into the vision.
- Encourage teams to keep projects provocative but full of love and fun—whether that means giving out popsicles, sharing music and food, wearing costumes, or organizing a flash mob.
- Engage with project teams to identify how their campaign/action will bring more people together and attract more people to the network.

Note: *The reconnect with the spirit of community organizing created through the Close to Home approach, read and reflect upon all the ideas and concepts outlined in* Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

The Act Phase

Learning from Experience

It was a powerful moment when network members succeeded in packing a local pub for the launch of their campaign called "What's Your Tool?" The campaign showed how a cup of coffee, a cell phone, a soccer ball (playing sports), or a knitting project is all you need to start conversations about domestic and sexual violence—and how ultimately "you" are the best tool to prevent violence. Altogether, the campaign included posters featuring the various "tools," tip cards for how to start a conversation, as well as campaign coffee cups, T-shirts, and a knitting pattern. The posters and collateral materials were distributed and displayed at over 70 local businesses and organizations, with the campaign promoted at a block party, knitting circles, drumming circles, skill-building trainings, and presentations at civic meetings. As the first campaign/action for that network and an early step in changing community social norms, the campaign gave the community a simple (and fun) yet provocative start to co-creating a new way of being together.

Overview

What It Is

The Act phase is when the network engages the community in various campaigns/actions. These community organizing activities make the issues of domestic and sexual violence more public, catalyze deeper conversations, and begin to generate a shift in social norms. Each campaign/action engages different aspects of the community, creating opportunities for more people to explore stepping into new ways of being—new perspectives on their own life, new attitudes and behaviors, new confidence in what they can do to effect change. Altogether, a surge of activity takes the community deeper into creating a lasting culture of violence prevention.

Why It's Important

It is through these campaigns/actions that the network shares its spirit of openness, intention, conversation, playfulness, and hope—a spirit needed for moving through the struggles of violence prevention and for grappling with resistance to change. After months of living the principles of this work and living their vision, the network shares not only their campaigns/actions with the public but also the sense of community that is possible. The way in which network members work together demonstrates how change begins in the present—and invites everyone to join that change.

What's Happening to the Network

In the Act phase, the network continues to grow organically—with more connections and stronger relationships—as the various campaigns/actions engage greater participation from the broader community. Rather than this phase becoming a culmination or end point, it becomes a time of expansion—spreading the spirit of the work, growing network membership, and creating a new foundation for cycling through the phases again.

1

TAKE ACTION. At last, network teams implement their projects. Depending on the project, this process could be a single event that supports ongoing community building and/or the launch of a specific campaign that lasts for several months. Ideally, at this time, a variety of campaigns/actions are unfolding across the community, engaging different aspects of the community simultaneously.

2

DEBRIEF WHAT WAS DISCOVERED AND LEARNED. Network teams debrief what worked and what could be improved about specific actions. Lessons learned are documented and shared across the network to increase innovation and learning, cross-pollinate ideas, and inspire one another as the network cycles through and deepens work in each phase.

3

CELEBRATE THE NETWORK AND ITS ACHIEVEMENTS. The network takes time to celebrate their accomplishments and to feel connected to the greater vision. Because social change is a long process, it is critical to celebrate small successes along the way, through food, connection, and recognition of network members' contributions.

4

IDENTIFY NEW OPPORTUNITIES. Through the learnings and insights gathered from community organizing, and as the network looks toward another cycle of the process, opportunities for further action are identified. Over time, it is important to assess where the community is at in its level of comfort, engagement, and ownership of the issues of domestic and sexual violence, so that the network can design the next approach to the cycle based on what will carry the community deeper into its participation in social change.

A GROWING NETWORK

Foundations *for* Implementation

Pacing and Timing

Time needed – The Act phase typically spans approximately three months. However, keep in mind that this can vary greatly depending on the number of people and teams sharing the work, how often they meet, and how much time they have for moving the work forward.

Throughout the phase – The planned campaigns/actions become your framework. However, you will want to leave a lot of unplanned time and space, because the heart of social change is in what emerges from those experiences, and in how quickly and creatively the network seizes opportunities for deepening community engagement.

Throughout the process – Unlike other phases that may be returned to at any time, the Act phase always follows the Build phase and only when the network is ready to share a campaign/action with the community. Keep in mind that if you have multiple project teams, they will likely enter the Act phase at different times. As the work grows and iterates, this will lead to having one or more teams in the Act phase at all times.

Note: *See the "Approach" section of* Communities Leading Change *for an overview of the pacing and timing of the entire Close to Home process (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Core Skills and Knowledge

This phase is about network members launching and sustaining their campaigns/actions in the community. To do this, skills and knowledge from the previous three phases come together synergistically to provide network members with a sense of ownership in community organizing. Consider talking with network members about all the skills and knowledge they will draw upon, and organizing some meetings to role play scenarios and exchange tips. Focus on refreshing skills and knowledge that will support network members in doing the following:

- Starting conversations with community members about domestic and sexual violence
- Describing the network and its activities
- Responding to questions and divergent views
- Making people feel relaxed and curious
- Engaging people in action and building power together
- Staying awake to every new opportunity that arises

Relationship Building

Every campaign/action should create moments in which community members can get to know each other. Similarly, encourage network members to engage with people as neighbors, by truly getting to know people before creating a way to follow up. For network members, each moment of relationship building in the Act phase is a moment for preparing for the next cycle. By engaging with openness and non-judgment, network members will notice those who may be ideal for a one-on-one in the next Assess phase or for hosting a kitchen table conversation in the next Talk phase. At the end of the Act phase, take time to honor existing relationships by organizing celebrations that recognize people's contributions and by providing options for involvement going forward.

Documentation and Evaluation

It is important to carefully track community engagement as you bring campaigns/actions into the community—such as the number of people engaged, real outcomes compared to the anticipated outcomes, what worked and what did not, the spontaneous moments that emerged, media coverage and social media activity, etc. In particular, collect any stories or testimonials about how campaigns/actions lead to changes in people's beliefs and behaviors—accumulating qualitative evidence in support of community organizing. As you reach the end of the Act phase, consolidate everything you have tracked through your ongoing documentation. Compile all the numbers and details that demonstrate your effort, reach, and impact, and celebrate what you have accomplished. Think about how you can use this data to advocate for more funding or community support, as you prepare to cycle through the phases again. Also, if you collected baseline data at the start, you will likely now collect some follow-up data for measuring impact.

Principles

It is important to practice all nine Closse to Home principles throughout the process. However, to deepen practice, consider paying particular attention to a few key principles during each phase. During the Act phase, we recommend staying grounded in the following:

- **A Fierce Commitment to Community** – modeling your belief in the power of community to lead and shape solutions.
- **Patience and Persistence** – creating space for perspectives and social norms to rub together, surfacing what people really think and maintaining a true listening stance.
- **Beloved Community** – fostering a spirit of laughter, play, joy, and love, while making room for fear, shame, sadness, and conflict without judgment.
- **Network Leadership** – making the network and its shared leadership visible to the community and an invitation to build power together.
- **Powerful Relationships** – making relationship building the foundation of all action.

Note: *You can find full descriptions of all nine Close to Home principles in the document* Communities Leading Change *(download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

Messy Truths

During the Act phase, network members will likely encounter discouraging community resistance and indifference—such as people undermining youth leadership, booing an event, or no one even showing up. This is normal. If it didn't happen, it would be weird. The challenge is in staying grounded in the long-term vision, while using these experiences as moments for learning. Prepare network members' expectations in advance and then look at each instance when it occurs critically and objectively, asking yourselves, "Is there a creative solution that could prevent this from happening again? Or was this simply the realities of the work?" The network mindset is that of an ongoing journey—if something doesn't work out, you learn from it deeply and move on. You can help network members stay in the journey by keeping a balance of lightness and respect throughout these experiences. Remind network members of what has already been achieved, that all is not lost, and that the Act phase is just one of many layers of impact.

Outcomes

If you move through the steps of this phase in alignment with the Close to Home principles, you should finish by achieving the following outcomes toward realizing the shared vision in the community:

Within the Network

- Network members evaluating and shifting their own values and behaviors, and creating change in their own lives and social networks
- Increased organizing and advocacy skills among network members

Beyond the Network

- More voices and perspectives deepening and broadening the shared analysis of domestic and sexual violence
- Evidence and stories of people taking action in their personal lives and peer groups, based on changes in values and culture
- Evidence and stories of community leadership / civic leaders making changes to community priorities, structures, procedures, and policies, in support of changing social norms
- Evidence and stories of an increased focus on domestic and sexual violence in public forums and the media
- New interest from and alliances with formal community leaders and local businesses
- Surge in network membership and ideas for future campaigns/actions

Big Questions *and* Real Answers

How do you take the community deeper without progressing too quickly?

By ensuring every moment in the work is rich with relationship building and storytelling—designed for learning from and with each other—you will naturally learn from the community what needs to happen next. The process itself will tell you how and when to go deeper. This is another reason why it is imperative that network members save their energy for the Act phase. It is one thing to simply execute a campaign/action in the community; it is another to do so with open eyes and open minds for learning from that campaign/action about the next possibilities for change. In this way, just as network members learned in the Assess and Talk phases how to meet people wherever they are in a conversation, in the Act phase they now learn to meet the community wherever it is on its path of social change. Within this context, the first round of the Act phase may be mostly about breaking silence, and thus look a lot like the Talk phase. This is okay. The intention is still about community members taking action in a way that helps prevent violence. When the community is ready, the campaigns will naturally become bolder.

How do you manage an ever-growing network?

Before it is needed, establish a culture and communication strategy that will ensure individuals within the network feel connected to the collective as it grows and gains strength. This may be through social networking platforms, electronic newsletters, cross-network social activities, an online tally of the network's growing size, and/or playful incentives for engaging with and supporting other parts of the network. You may even want to create an "internal communications" or "network awareness" working group tasked with creating ways for people to connect with other pieces of the process or provide feedback for the benefit of all—about what is working, what network members are learning, and, when a team or project falls apart, what the network is learning from that process to strengthen everything else. The collective experience of the network is paramount, since without the network the work does not exist.

What if community members want to do something to respond to active violence?

The purpose of the network is violence prevention and changing the social norms that perpetuate violence. However, many community members will turn to the network for tips on how to respond to active violence, often looking for alternatives to engaging the legal system. Equip network members with answers and alternatives for how people can take action. There is a natural overlap between intervention and prevention, and discussing how to respond to active violence often opens the door for engaging community members in long-term social change. You can find resources on ways to respond to active violence at www.c2home.org.

How do you turn an ending into a beginning?

Network discussions during the Act phase should be as much about what is happening in that moment, as what that means for the next cycle of the process. However, that does not mean that the Act phase should move seamlessly into the next round of Assess. After celebrating all that has been accomplished, the Act phase is best followed by a time for rest and renewal—which is critical for sustaining involvement, energy, and creativity in the network. Approach this time with as much intention and respect as you do the other work. Start by sharing the date for when the network will meet to re-initiate the Assess phase. Then create a calendar of events until then of periodic workshops and social gatherings for anyone who is interested. If you have a network-wide newsletter, consider writing some stories about the changes that are being noticed in the community, some reflections on the past cycle of work, and some prompts for idea generation looking ahead. During all of this, some network members will simply take time for themselves, and this is okay too. These slower times allow for a more free-flowing engagement that sparks creativity for the next cycle. As the network grows, you may find that what is a quiet time for some parts of the network, is a time when other parts come to life—allowing network members to become active participants in each other's work.

How do individual campaigns/actions succeed in changing social norms?

In community organizing, nothing is a one-off. A campaign/action is an entry point for inviting people into a new way of being together, sparking a whole series of dynamic actions as a result. Also, typically more than one campaign/action is unfolding at one time, with community members encountering something in one part of their day and then something else in another part of their day. Over time, the effect is that many people they know, from their neighbor to their local politician, seems touched or engaged in some way. Everyone from their local shopkeeper to their kids' after-school program seems to be putting their name behind the effort. The multiple exposures and the emerging critical mass of support add credibility and momentum until the proposed ideas and actions begin to feel like the new normal.

This is what we have experienced as true through the stories of others and through the change we have observed in values, cultures, priorities, and structures when this work is well underway. This change inspires us to push further down the path of making community organizing more common. However, statistical evidence supporting community organizing to prevent domestic and sexual violence is still slim. There is so much work to be done to understand and measure the impact of these efforts.

Note: *See the "Lasting Social Change" section of* Communities Leading Change *for more about how this community organizing approach facilitates change (download PDF at www.c2home.org).*

close to home

The Close to Home approach engages whole communities in designing solutions and leading social change for domestic and sexual violence prevention. Go to **www.c2home.org** to learn more and to download these essential documents:

COMMUNITIES LEADING CHANGE:

An overview of Close to Home's philosophy and practice for domestic and sexual violence prevention

The starting point for practitioners, funders, or municipalities interested in learning more about the Close to Home approach.

THE ASSESS GUIDE:

How to use action research in Close to Home's community organizing approach

A detailed implementation guide for the first phase of the Close to Home approach, essential to ensuring the experience becomes community driven and led.

TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS:

Lessons learned from using the Close to Home approach

Insights and learnings for all four phases of the Close to Home approach, providing practitioners with guideposts within a flexible journey of change.