

# Community Readiness



# What is community readiness?

**Community readiness** refers to the level of preparedness and enthusiasm a community has in addressing a specific issue, particularly when it comes to implementing new programs, practices, or policies. It's not just about wanting to make a change; it's about having the true capacity and determination to make that change successful.

Establishing a community's readiness *before* embarking on the process of prevention can profoundly impact the effectiveness of an initiative's outcomes. By gauging a community's readiness, we can ensure that our efforts to identify problems and assess needs lead to truly impactful and sustainable solutions.



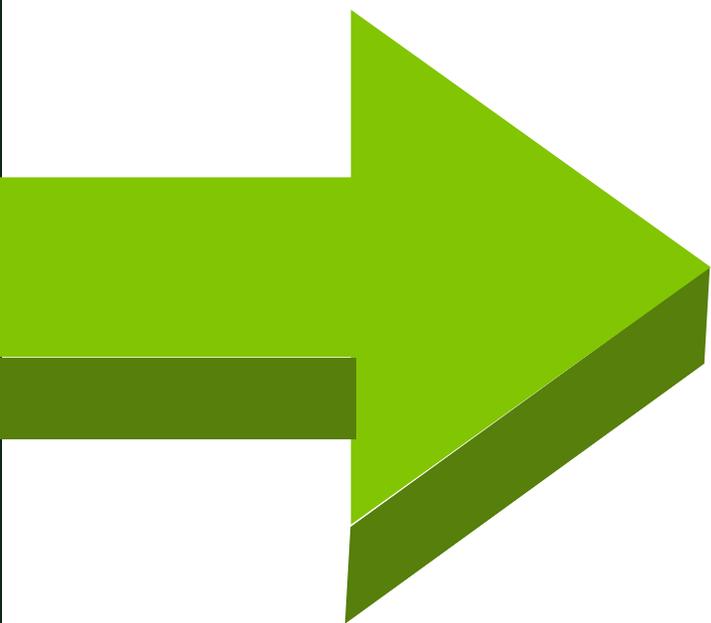
*"Readiness includes a belief that improvement is possible and a willingness to act."*  
**-Colorado Association of School Boards**



# Using this tool, you will learn...



- 1. What community readiness is and its key aspects.** You'll learn why building this readiness, through well-timed efforts and teamwork, is essential *before* starting any prevention programs.
- 2. How to effectively assess community problems and needs.** This will enable you to select and utilize the most effective assessment method to inform your prevention strategies.
- 3. How to evaluate a community's preparedness to act.** We'll do this by applying the Colorado State University (CSU) Tri-Ethnic Center's Community Readiness Model (CRM), using its nine levels and five dimensions of readiness to understand a community's current stage of readiness.<sup>1</sup>



## ***Helpful hint!***

A list of terms used throughout this tool can be found near the end of the document. Additionally, follow the QR codes throughout this tool to view related videos with more information!

# How does community readiness benefit prevention?

Successful prevention efforts, including those focused on mental and behavioral well-being, depend on the capacity and willingness of a community's **stakeholders** to make them effective and sustainable.

## Establish Community Readiness Early

Establishing community readiness *before* launching a new prevention program or practice empowers stakeholders to...

- Create a shared vision and ownership for the effort.
- Determine best fit and proven strategies for addressing a community's gaps and assets.
- Ensure the use of culturally relevant and sustainable resources.



By establishing community readiness *before* addressing a local issue...

- **Valuable resources are conserved.** Time, money, and people are most effectively utilized when communities are ready to take action. Investing resources before readiness is established often leads to wasted effort and stalled progress.
- **Community involvement is promoted.** When a community is ready, opportunities for collaboration and resource pooling arise. This ensures efforts seamlessly integrate into local cultural contexts and are more likely to be sustainable.
- **Burnout is reduced.** Prevention practitioners often face burnout due to the immense needs of their communities. Implementing programs only when a community is truly ready ensures optimal use of time, resources, and capacity, minimizing this risk.

***By understanding and prioritizing community readiness, more impactful, sustainable, and less taxing prevention initiatives can be implemented.***

# The Five Dimensions of Community Readiness



There are **five key dimensions** to consider when assessing a community's ability to implement, support, and sustain prevention efforts.<sup>1</sup>

**1. Knowledge of the Issue:** The community's general understanding and awareness of the specific problem or issue.

*Consider: How much does the community really know about the identified issue? Does the community see the identified issue as a problem that needs attention?*

**2. Knowledge of Efforts:** The community's familiarity with existing prevention or intervention efforts and what has been tried previously. This includes understanding what programs exist, who runs them, who they serve, and how accessible they are to the community.

*Consider: How much does the community know about the efforts already underway to address the issue? For example, are there other local programs tackling the same problem? Are those programs successful?*

**3. Leadership Support:** The level of active support and advocacy from key community leaders and influential figures for addressing the issue.

*Consider: Do local leaders see the issue as a priority? For example, are there school board members who can use their power to support district-wide prevention programs?*

**4. Community Climate:** The prevailing attitudes, beliefs, and stigma within the community regarding the issue, and the willingness to openly address it. This dimension considers whether there is general support, disinterest, or even resistance towards addressing the issue.

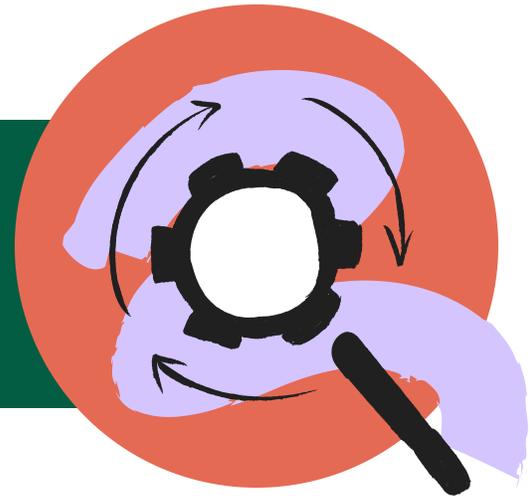
*Consider: What is the overall feeling within the community towards addressing the issue? For instance, in a community where youth mental health is in decline, are individuals invested in or indifferent towards working to increase mental health support?*

**5. Availability of Resources:** The extent to which the community has access to or possesses the necessary human, financial, and organizational assets to implement successful initiatives.

*Consider: What resources are available or could be mobilized to address the issue? For example, how many facilitators are needed to run a particular prevention program? What materials, time, and energy might also be required?*

# The Five Dimensions of Community Readiness: A Closer Look

To further explore the **five dimensions of community readiness**, let's take a look at Just Jump Falls and Readyville. The stories of these two fictional communities, inspired by real Colorado experiences, will illustrate the power of preparation.



Introducing...

## *Just Jump Falls*

Just Jump Falls “jumped in” before fully building readiness. In 2023, they attempted to relaunch Go Families!, a program focused on family resilience that was successful two decades prior, but the community climate had shifted dramatically. Local school leaders, who were key to the program’s success before, lacked resources and weren’t invested due to competing priorities. Without their buy-in and enough participants, Go Families! couldn’t take off.

Introducing...

## *Readyville*

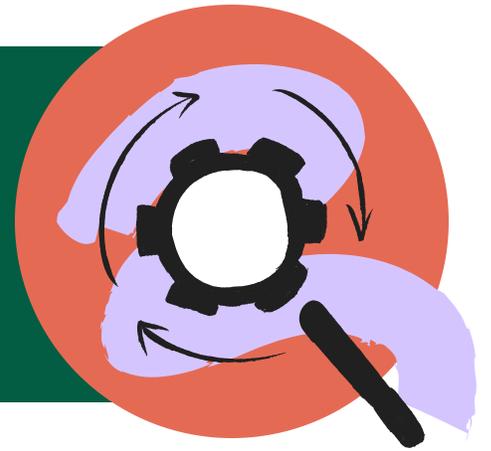
Readyville is a mountainous Colorado region. Due to its isolation, Readyville proactively built a strong network of collaborations, involving public health officials, universities, schools, and community members. This teamwork ensured clear knowledge of the issues, strong leadership buy-in, an invested community, and shared resources. As a result, their youth substance use prevention program is widespread and highly successful!

### 1. Knowledge of the Issue

In Just Jump Falls, residents didn’t believe family connection was an issue. Community members demonstrated a lack of awareness, as evidenced by the scarcity of conversations and acknowledgment of the problem.

In Readyville, the community believed youth substance use was a real problem and was actively mapping it. Residents partook in conversations about substance use and expressed a desire to fix it.

# The Five Dimensions of Community Readiness: A Closer Look



## *Just Jump Falls*

## *Readyville*

### 2. Knowledge of Efforts

In Just Jump Falls, community members had limited awareness of Go Families! or other existing family support services.

Readyville had high awareness of its numerous prevention programs, which was shared widely through its network. The general success and challenges of these programs were also known throughout the community.

### 3. Leadership Support

Just Jump Falls' leaders recognized the struggles of families, but there were other competing priorities that impacted buy-in.

Readyville's leaders – from public health to school officials – proactively use data to identify and implement strategies for youth.

### 4. Community Climate

Just Jump Falls exhibited a general indifference towards family resilience, with many community members believing that local families did not require additional support.

Readyville has a community climate that is invested in youth substance use prevention, with residents actively supporting this cause.

### 5. Availability of Resources

Just Jump Falls lacks funding, organizational support, and strong networks for their family program.

Readyville secured multiple grants and boasts strong organizational support and social capital for its youth program.

# A Team Approach to Building Readiness

Building community readiness and later successfully implementing prevention programs cannot and should not happen in isolation. Local collaboration among stakeholders is vital for laying a strong foundation to address and prevent community issues, thereby boosting overall community capacity and reducing the risk of burnout among those leading the charge.

## Local Prevention Delivery Systems Built from Scratch

Sometimes, the ideal team of stakeholders needed to address your community's needs doesn't already exist. When that happens, you'll need to build a new team by considering...

- **Diverse Stakeholder Representation:** It is crucial to have a mix of perspectives and roles. Do your best to ensure your team includes:
  - **Administrators with decision-making authority** who can greenlight initiatives and allocate resources.
  - **Program implementers** who are on the ground, delivering services directly to the community.
  - **Youth, family, and community partners** who bring invaluable local knowledge and lived experiences.
- **Clear Team Vision and Processes:** Your new team will need a shared understanding of its goals. Establish clear processes for collaboration, including guidelines for providing feedback, communicating effectively, and evaluating progress.



Successful prevention is never a solo endeavor. It's a collaborative journey powered by a multi-layered approach – from researchers translating science into actionable tools, to support systems building local capacity, and, most importantly, dedicated prevention teams on the ground.



**Don't Reinvent the Wheel:** Whenever possible, use existing teams to serve as the local prevention team.



# Identifying the Issue:

## The Foundation of Community Readiness

Before selecting or implementing an intervention, it is essential to understand the challenges facing the community and identify the specific needs that, if addressed, can lead to positive change. Evaluating a community need is an essential step in building community readiness because it moves beyond a general problem statement to pinpoint the specific, actionable issues that require attention.

**While problem identification may seem straightforward, it is crucial to understand where your community may be struggling before dedicating valuable resources to solutions. This means engaging deeply by...**

- Listening to community members' lived experiences.
- Looking for patterns that reveal larger systemic issues.
- Conducting a community needs assessment.



**Consider:** What are some methods you might use to gather diverse perspectives on community problems?

When defining community problems, it's important to seek diverse perspectives from all stakeholders. This requires actively reaching out to those whose voices might be less readily heard or who can't easily participate in traditional forums, such as town halls.

**Remember that community priorities vary widely.** For instance, some might be concerned about the impact of social media on youth mental health, while others are struggling with access to healthy foods or a lack of affordable and accessible childcare. The ultimate goal is to direct resources where they will have the greatest impact and address the most critical and widely felt needs across the entire community.

# Conducting a Community Needs Assessment

Needs assessments can vary in scope and depth, from utilizing existing data to conducting key informant interviews. Here, we provide a range of assessment approaches to help you select the most appropriate level of assessment for your community.



**To conduct a high-level needs assessment, consider using existing data to identify your community's problems and needs. These data often include publicly available records and reports from various levels of government and local organizations. A few examples are...**

- **School District Data:** School climate surveys, engagement metrics, observation data, discipline and behavior reports, attendance and graduation rates, academic performance, mental health indicators, resource allocation data, program effectiveness.
- **Local City and County Government Data:** Demographics, economic development, housing, public safety, education, and transportation information.
- **Local Health Department Data:** Community health assessments, community health improvement plans, and health behavior statistics.
- **Local Law Enforcement Agency Data:** Crime statistics and safety data.
- **Hospital Accreditation Reports:** Insights into community health trends and needs.

# Conducting a Community Needs Assessment

To conduct a **more in-depth needs assessment**, consider collecting new information directly from the community. This often involves creating your own survey or focus group questions to distribute to community members familiar with the issue. The goals of these methods are to provide opportunities for community voices to be heard and gather more nuanced perspectives than existing data often provides. Find general tips below, and more specific information on creating survey questions on the *Other Community Readiness Assessment Resources* page near the end of this tool.



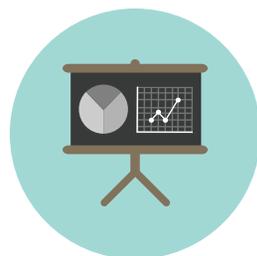
*It's best to craft open-ended questions or those that use rating scales, rather than simple "yes" or "no" responses. This encourages individuals to elaborate on their thoughts, providing deeper insights into the problem and potential solutions.*

- **Methods for collecting new information:**
  - **Key informant interviews:** Conduct one-on-one conversations with individuals who have deep knowledge or unique perspectives on the issue.
  - **Targeted Surveys:** Distribute your custom survey to select community members, teachers, administrators, and other relevant groups.
  - **Focus Groups:** Facilitate focus groups with community members who can shed light on the issue and other community needs.
- **When gathering new information, there are various strategies to ensure your survey questions are precise, culturally appropriate, and reliable. This involves:**
  - **Collaborating with Stakeholders:** Work closely with individuals involved in the issue to ensure the questions are relevant and accurately capture their lived experiences.
  - **Conducting Group Discussions:** Facilitate focus groups where community members can provide feedback on survey questions to identify potential ambiguities and suggest crucial additions or removals.
  - **Consulting with Researchers:** Engage with subject matter experts to review survey instruments for validity, reliability, and appropriate scaling. The simplest way to start a comprehensive needs assessment is to contact the CSU Prevention Research Center! We're happy to provide you with advice, assist you in selecting surveys, and offer support to communities in Colorado.

# Assessing Community Readiness: The Community Readiness Model

After recognizing a community problem and thoroughly evaluating its specific needs through a Community Needs Assessment, the next step is to understand your community's readiness to act on those identified needs. By understanding both what the community needs and its readiness to act, stakeholders can implement targeted strategies to improve specific outcomes.

While various methods exist to assess community readiness, we will focus on the practical and user-friendly **Community Readiness Model** (CRM) from Colorado State University's (CSU) Tri-Ethnic Center. This powerful tool assesses your community's current capacity and willingness to act, ensuring that your prevention efforts are not only relevant but also effectively implemented and sustained for lasting positive change. Using the CRM helps you tailor your approach, conserve resources, foster ownership, and prevent burnout.



# The Community Readiness Model

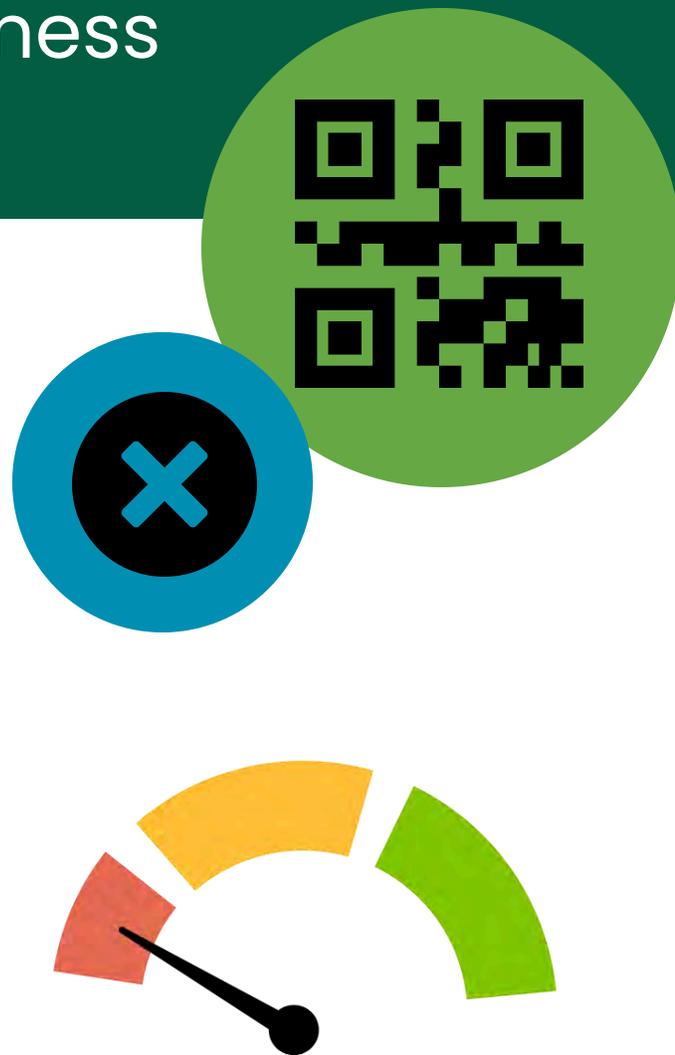
The **Community Readiness Model** is a nine-level framework used to chart a community's journey in addressing a specific issue, ranging from a complete lack of awareness (Level 1) to full ownership and action (Level 9). These levels reflect a continuum of increasing awareness, positive attitudes, comprehensive knowledge, and proactive actions.



As outlined earlier, the five dimensions of community readiness – **Community Knowledge of the Issue and Efforts, Leadership, Community Climate, and Resources** – serve as the lenses through which we evaluate a community's standing on this spectrum. The presence and strength of these critical dimensions deepen as a community progresses through the nine levels, ultimately determining its capacity to act on identified needs and informing tailored strategies for building preparedness and facilitating meaningful change.

# The Community Readiness Model: Levels 1-3

- **Level 1: No Awareness.** The issue is largely unrecognized by the community.
- **Level 2: Denial/Resistance.** The issue is acknowledged in general, but its local relevance is denied. The primary goal for change agents at this stage is to gently challenge this denial, raise awareness of local relevance (using local data and stories), and begin to build a sense of shared concern without triggering strong defensiveness. Focus on gently and repeatedly presenting basic information and local relevance, aiming to shift the perception from “not our problem” to “maybe it is.”
- **Level 3: Vague Awareness.** There’s a sense that a problem exists locally, but there is no impetus for action. The primary goal for change agents at this stage is to provide clear and relevant local data, raise awareness of the issue’s specific impact on the community, and begin to foster a sense of shared concern and the need for a more organized response. Encourage initial discussions and the formation of small, informal groups interested in exploring the issue further.



**Levels 1 through 3 of the CRM** reflect low community readiness and signify the initial stages where a community’s awareness and willingness to address a specific issue are minimal. Progressing from low community readiness to moderate community readiness requires a shift from a lack of awareness and engagement to the initial stages of recognition and action. The key is to gently introduce the issue, build basic understanding, and foster a sense that something can and should be done. This is a gradual process that requires patience, persistence, and culturally sensitive communication.

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 1 – No Awareness

The primary focus at this stage is to **raise awareness** and help the community begin to **recognize the issue** as a local concern. The key is to get the issue on the community's radar. At this level, you may consider **establishing a small group of diverse stakeholders** who are aware of and can champion the issue and solutions.

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *No Awareness* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
Community Knowledge of the Issue	Unaware of the issue(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit existing &amp; established small groups to inform about the issue</li> <li>• Introduce the issue gently</li> <li>• Use simple facts &amp; local data to highlight its relevance in a non-alarming way</li> </ul>
Community Knowledge of Efforts	Unaware of local efforts to address the issue(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct personalized meetings with community leaders &amp; members</li> <li>• Carefully consider the message, who delivers it, &amp; other relevant details</li> </ul>
Leadership	The issue is not a major concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage individuals who show even a slight interest</li> <li>• Mobilize them to support your efforts by providing engaging ideas &amp; information to share on social media platforms</li> </ul>
Community Climate	The issue is not a concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect &amp; share stories of local people affected by the issue</li> <li>• Frame it in relation to shared community values &amp; goals</li> </ul>
Resources	No resources available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, &amp; threats</li> <li>• Start with small, manageable actions that require minimal resources to build momentum.</li> </ul>

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 2 – *Denial/Resistance*

The primary goal at this stage is to **gently challenge** denial, **raise awareness**, of local relevance using local data and stories, and begin to **build a sense of shared concern** without triggering strong defensiveness. Focus on gently and repeatedly **presenting basic information with local relevance**, aiming to shift the perception from "*not our problem*" to "*maybe it is.*"

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *Denial/Resistance* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
Community Knowledge of the Issue	Knowledge is limited to a few community members & misconceptions are present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address myths &amp; misconceptions</li> <li>Counter denial or misinformation with factual information</li> </ul>
Community Knowledge of Efforts	Misconceptions or incorrect knowledge exist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with community leaders &amp; members to inform about efforts for addressing the issue</li> <li>Share examples of successful initiatives from similar communities</li> </ul>
Leadership	Do not consider the issue as a concern or believe it's not possible or appropriate to address it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect with community influencers to promote knowledge of the issue &amp; efforts</li> <li>Share basic information with formal &amp; informal leaders &amp; listen to their perspectives</li> </ul>
Community Climate	Issue is not a concern or feels impossible to address	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand the reasons behind denial/resistance</li> <li>Address concerns with empathy &amp; information</li> <li>Distribute media articles to raise awareness</li> </ul>
Resources	No support for use of available resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build momentum with small, manageable actions that require minimal resources</li> </ul>

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 3 – *Vague Awareness*

The primary goal at this stage is to **provide clear and relevant local data, raise awareness** of the issue's specific impact on the community, and begin to **foster a sense of shared concern** and the need for a more organized response. Encourage initial discussions and the formation of small, informal groups interested in exploring the issue further.

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *Vague Awareness* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
Community Knowledge of the Issue	Vague knowledge of the issue exists, including awareness of its potential causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share anonymous or general stories that illustrate the issue's impact</li> </ul>
Community Knowledge of Efforts	Some community members are aware of local efforts but have limited knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring to light any small initiatives that exist</li> </ul>
Leadership	Acknowledge that an issue exists but show no immediate motivation to act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene small, informal gatherings to discuss the issue</li> <li>• Let leaders know how they can get involved</li> </ul>
Community Climate	Issue is not a high priority compared to other concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build trust between those raising the issue &amp; the broader community</li> <li>• Focus on open communication</li> <li>• Organize engaging events to present information in a fun &amp; beneficial way</li> </ul>
Resources	Few resources are available to support further efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct positive outreach to connect community members with resources</li> <li>• Partner with trusted community leaders &amp; organizations</li> <li>• Apply for grants or local funding opportunities</li> </ul>

# The Community Readiness Model: Levels 4-6

- **Level 4: Preplanning.** Recognition of the problem leads to initial discussions, but planning is unfocused. The key focus for change agents at this stage is to support these early efforts, help formalize planning processes, engage more leaders, and continue to build broader community awareness and support for action. Formalize planning processes, actively engage more leaders, secure initial resource commitments, and build broader community awareness and support.
- **Level 5: Preparation.** Active planning begins with detailed considerations and resource gathering. The key focus for change agents at this stage is to support these early efforts, help formalize planning processes, engage more leaders, and continue to build broader community awareness and support for action. Launch pilot programs or initial efforts, ensure adequate training and support for implementation, and continue to build community buy-in.
- **Level 6: Initiation.** Programs and initiatives are launched, but are still considered new. The focus for change agents at this level is to provide ongoing support for implementation, help troubleshoot challenges, document early successes, and continue to broaden community engagement and buy-in to ensure the sustainability of these initial efforts.



**Levels 4 through 6 of the CRM** reflect communities with moderate community readiness who are beginning to acknowledge and engage with a specific issue. While progress is evident, these actions may still be in their early phases, potentially lacking widespread support or established infrastructure, signifying a transitional period towards more sustained and impactful engagement.

Progressing communities from moderate readiness to higher levels requires building on the initial momentum and fostering deeper engagement, infrastructure, and ownership. Focus on consistent communication and education, data-driven decision-making, and fostering collaboration and partnerships.

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 4 – Preplanning

The key focus for change at this stage is to **support early efforts**, help **formalize planning processes**, **engage more leaders**, **secure initial resource commitments**, and continue to **build broader community awareness** and support for action.

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *Preplanning* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
Community Knowledge of the Issue	Knowledge is limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactively address remaining misconceptions or misinformation</li> </ul>
Community Knowledge of Efforts	Some community members are aware but know little about them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase public awareness of existing programs, their goals, how they work, &amp; how to access them</li> </ul>
Leadership	Acknowledge the issue as a concern, recognizing action is needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify &amp; empower additional formal &amp; informal leaders to be vocal advocates</li> </ul>
Community Climate	Members are beginning to discuss the issue more seriously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster community-wide understanding that addressing the issue is everyone's concern</li> <li>Address underlying reasons for remaining resistance</li> </ul>
Resources	Limited resources are available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen community networks &amp; relationships to mobilize volunteers</li> <li>Identify potential resources within the community</li> <li>Establish partnerships that can address the issue</li> </ul>

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 5 – Preparation

The key focus is to **continue solutions** presented in Level 4 (*Preplanning*) in addition to **launching initial efforts** or **pilot programs**, ensuring adequate training and support for implementation, and **continue to build community buy-in**.

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *Preparation* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
Community Knowledge of the Issue	Basic knowledge of the causes, consequences, & signs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlight local stories &amp; data to illustrate the impact on the community</li> </ul>
Community Knowledge of Efforts	Most are aware of local efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share data &amp; testimonials that demonstrate positive impact of current efforts</li> </ul>
Leadership	Actively supports continuing, improving, or developing efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage key leaders to address the issue</li> </ul>
Community Climate	Members are concerned & want to take action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create more opportunities for community members to actively participate in solutions</li> </ul>
Resources	Some resources are identified for further efforts & community members & leaders are actively working to secure more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in training &amp; developing local expertise to implement &amp; sustain efforts</li> <li>Enhance the capacity of local organizers to effectively manage &amp; deliver programs</li> </ul>

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 6 – Initiation

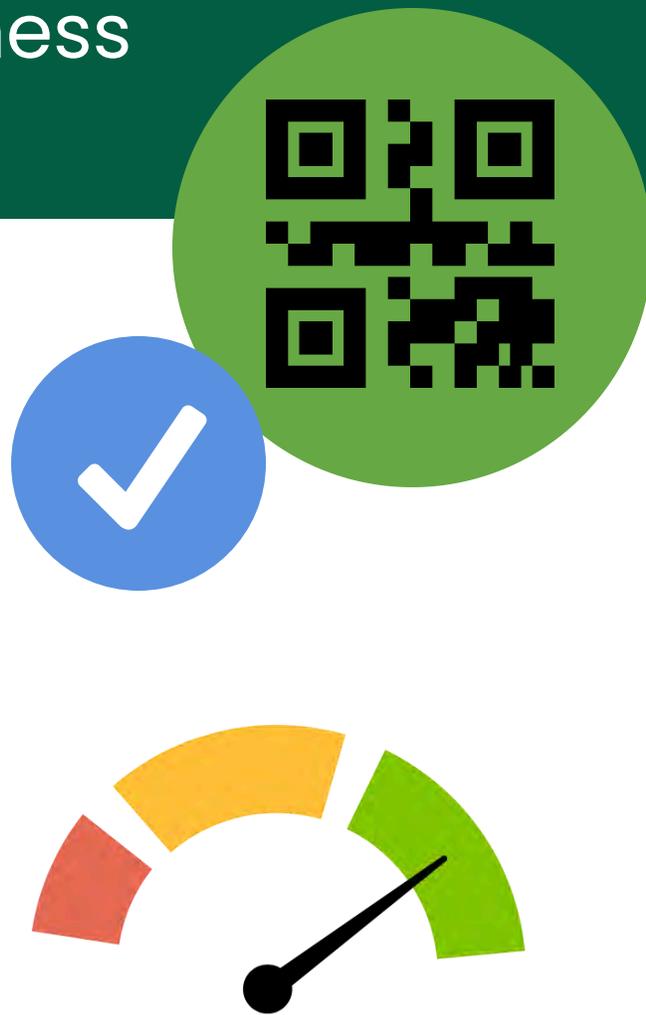
The key focus is to transition from initial action to long-term sustainability by deepening the understanding of systemic root causes and launching a strategic publicity plan. This phase emphasizes **ensuring equitable access** to programs for all community members, **formalizing leadership support** through **institutional strategic planning**, and **securing diverse, stable funding** to guarantee financial stability and reinforce positive community-wide behaviors.

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *Initiation* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
Community Knowledge of the Issue	Basic knowledge about the issue & its local presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move beyond basic awareness to a deeper understanding of the root causes, systemic factors, &amp; long-term consequences of the issue</li> </ul>
Community Knowledge of Efforts	Most members have at least a basic knowledge of local efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a publicity plan for the initiation of activities or efforts</li> <li>• Ensure programs are easily accessible to all segments of the community</li> </ul>
Leadership	Plays a key role in planning, developing, & implementing efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with leaders to integrate the issue into strategic plans &amp; ensure sustained political &amp; institutional support</li> </ul>
Community Climate	Community feels responsibility with some members involved in addressing the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight &amp; reinforce positive behaviors &amp; attitudes</li> </ul>
Resources	Resources have been secured & allocated for further efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore &amp; secure more stable &amp; diverse funding streams to ensure long-term financial stability</li> </ul>

# The Community Readiness Model: Levels 7-9

- **Level 7: Stabilization.** Efforts become established, with trained staff and administrative support in place. At this level, change agents may focus on ensuring the long-term sustainability of the programs, training new staff, and potentially considering evaluation for future improvements or expansion. Focus on rigorous evaluation to demonstrate effectiveness and use data to strategically expand reach and impact to underserved populations or related issues.
- **Level 8: Confirmation/Expansion.** Programs are well-established, and community support leads to expansion. At this level, change agents can focus on facilitating rigorous evaluation, supporting strategic planning for expansion, and helping to disseminate successful models to other communities. The key here is to fully empower the community to autonomously manage and sustain efforts. This involves shifting external support towards a facilitative role, with the community taking primary responsibility for ongoing evaluation, adaptation, and resource mobilization. The model for addressing the initial issue becomes a template for tackling other community challenges.
- **Level 9: Community Ownership.** The community demonstrates a comprehensive understanding and actively implements solutions.



**Levels 7 through 9 of the CRM** reflect communities with high readiness, moving beyond initial implementation and demonstrating a strong, sustained commitment to addressing a specific issue. To advance communities from already high levels of readiness towards even greater impact and sustainability, the focus shifts from initial implementation and expansion to deepening integration, fostering genuine community ownership, and ensuring continuous improvement. This represents a mature and proactive approach where the community not only acts but also actively seeks to refine and expand its efforts for lasting benefit.

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 7 – Stabilization

At this level, focus on **ensuring long-term sustainability** of the programs, training new staff, and potentially beginning to **think about evaluation** for future improvements or expansion. Focus on using outcomes to **demonstrate effectiveness** and **use data to strategically expand reach** and impact to underserved populations or related issues.

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *Stabilization* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
Community Knowledge of the Issue	In-depth knowledge about the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage deeper community understanding of the complexities of the issue, including systemic factors, social determinants, &amp; emerging research</li> </ul>
Community Knowledge of Efforts	Detailed knowledge of local efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure all segments of the community are not only aware but also actively utilizing effective programs &amp; services</li> </ul>
Leadership	Actively works to ensure or enhance long-term viability of efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultivate leadership at all levels of the community, empowering more individuals &amp; groups to champion the issue</li> </ul>
Community Climate	Attitude is to take responsibility & ongoing community involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nurture a community climate where addressing the issue is strongly supported by shared values &amp; norms</li> </ul>
Resources	A significant portion of allocated resources comes from sources expected to provide ongoing support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimize the use of local expertise, volunteers, in-kind contributions, &amp; existing infrastructure</li> </ul>

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 8 – Confirmation/Expansion

At this level, focus on **facilitating rigorous evaluation**, supporting **strategic planning for expansion**, and helping to **disseminate successful models** to other communities. The key is to fully **empower the community to autonomously manage** and **sustain efforts**. This involves shifting external support towards a facilitative role, with the community taking primary responsibility for ongoing evaluation, adaptation, and resource mobilization. The model for addressing the initial issue becomes a template for tackling other community challenges.

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *Confirmation/Expansion* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
<b>Community Knowledge of the Issue</b>	Demonstrate advanced knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate the sharing of local expertise &amp; best practices among members &amp; organizations</li> </ul>
<b>Community Knowledge of Efforts</b>	Most members are very knowledgeable & understand how effective programs are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support members in taking ownership of adapting &amp; refining existing programs to better meet evolving local needs</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	Plays a crucial role in expanding & improving efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support local leaders in advocating for policies &amp; resources at regional, state, &amp; national levels</li> </ul>
<b>Community Climate</b>	Support for efforts is strong with high participation levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foster a sense of collective efficacy &amp; a proactive approach to identifying &amp; addressing emerging challenges related to the issue</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	Allocated resources are largely expected to provide continuous support with additional resources being sought out to support new efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure diverse &amp; long-term funding streams through a mix of local, regional, &amp; national sources</li> </ul>

# Solutions for Progressing: Level 9 – Community Ownership

The key focus is to **institutionalize and refine established efforts** through advanced professional training and data-driven adaptations based on external evaluations. This phase prioritizes long-term sustainability by **managing smooth leadership transitions**, exploring **permanent funding mechanisms** like local endowments, and **maintaining rigorous outcome tracking** for future support. By providing regular progress reports and creating ongoing opportunities for public participation, the community ensures high-level ownership and the continuous evaluation of its collective response.

The table below provides descriptions of a community at the *Community Ownership* stage according to each of the five dimensions and provides potential solutions for addressing each dimension.

Readiness Dimension	Level 1	Solutions
<b>Community Knowledge of the Issue</b>	Possess detailed & significant knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide ongoing advanced training</li> <li>• Systematically reassess the issue &amp; progress made</li> </ul>
<b>Community Knowledge of Efforts</b>	A majority of community members possess extensive & detailed knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize feedback from external evaluations to drive program modifications</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	Regularly uses evaluation results to adapt financial & other supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain regular progress reports for community leaders &amp; sponsors</li> <li>• Ensure that leadership transitions are smooth and do not disrupt the ongoing commitment to addressing issues</li> </ul>
<b>Community Climate</b>	Major segments of the community demonstrate high levels of support & active involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create ongoing opportunities for community members to actively participate in sharpening &amp; sustaining solutions</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	Ongoing efforts are supported by secured, diversified resources & funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore options for establishing local endowments or other sustainable support mechanisms</li> <li>• Track &amp; maintain outcome data to strengthen grant proposals</li> </ul>

# Assessing Your Community's Readiness

The Community Readiness Model is a systematic process that involves gathering qualitative data to determine a community's position on the readiness continuum for a specific issue across each of the five dimensions. A key part of assessing community readiness is asking questions related to each of the five dimensions. For examples of questions to ask, see Appendix A (p. 43) of the **Community Readiness Model handbook**. Other examples might include...

- **Target Issue:**
  - What do people in this community generally understand about the causes and consequences of the issue?
  - How is this issue seen as impacting our local area?
- **Community Knowledge of Existing Efforts**
  - What programs or activities are currently in place to address the issue in our community?
  - How aware is the general community of these efforts?
- **Leadership**
  - What is the attitude of key leaders (informal and formal) towards addressing the issue?
  - How involved are they in current efforts?
- **Community Climate**
  - What are the general attitudes and opinions in the community about the issue?
  - Is there support, apathy, or resistance to addressing it?
- **Resources**
  - What resources (time, money, people, space, organizations) are currently being used or could be used to address the issue?
  - Is there a willingness to address the issue?
  - Is there a willingness to allocate more resources?



# Other Community Readiness Assessment Resources

Several methods exist for assessing community readiness. When selecting an assessment, consider utilizing existing resources and ensuring that the chosen assessment accounts for the unique community context, climate, and culture. To determine what works for your unique community, consider using these tools:



- **Colorado State University Tri-Ethnic Center:** [\*Community Readiness Model\*](#)
- **SAMHSA Guide:** [\*Tools to Assess Community Readiness to Prevent Substance Misuse\*](#)
- **The CSU PRC's RTP Tool:** [\*Community Needs Assessments\*](#). This quick guide provides valuable guidance, resources, and templates.
- **Community Toolbox:** [\*Readiness Assessment Toolkit\*](#)
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [\*Community Health Assessment and Group Evaluation \(CHANGE\) Tool\*](#)

## Existing Data for Conducting a Community Needs Assessment:

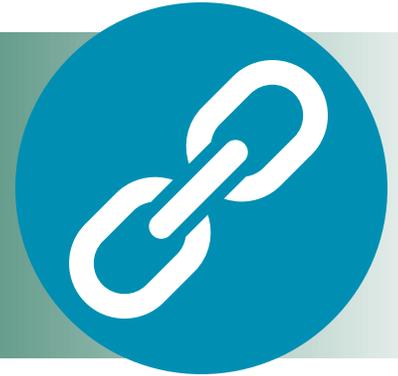
- **[United States Census Bureau: QuickFacts](#)**  
Provides demographic (e.g., population estimates, characteristics), business (e.g., employment, ownership), and geographic (e.g., land area, population density) information broken down by state, county, city, town, and zip code.
- **[American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#)**  
An annual survey offering current and detailed socioeconomic data on income, poverty, education, employment, housing costs, health insurance coverage, disability, and more.
- **[Kids Count Data Center by the Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)**  
Collects indicators related to health, family and community, education, economic well-being, and demographics available by state, territory, major cities, or school districts.
- **[Healthy Kids Colorado Survey data](#)**  
A comprehensive health survey for Colorado students, covering mental health, substance use, physical activity, sexual health, and experiences of violence.
- **[Colorado Department of Education \(CDE\) District & School Dashboard](#)**  
Information on enrollment, demographics, academic achievement, academic growth, and postsecondary readiness for Colorado youth.
- **[Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment \(CDPHE\)](#)**  
Provides data across numerous health indicators, including mental and behavioral health metrics incorporated into their VISION (Visual Information System for Identifying Opportunities and Needs) dashboard.
- **[2021 Larimer County CSU Extension Community Needs Assessment](#)**  
Provides state-specific insights into community needs identified by Extension programs.

# Helpful terms:



- **Buy-in:** The support of individuals, organizations, and the community for change efforts that address local health and well-being concerns.
- **Capacity:** The combination of human, organizational, social capital, and fiscal resources that can be capitalized to address collective community problems and promote youth and family health and well-being.<sup>2</sup>
- **Community Readiness:** The level to which a community is ready to and capable of implementing new programs, practices, or policies that address an identified community issue with the determination and enthusiasm necessary for success.<sup>3</sup>
- **Community Readiness Model (CRM):** A framework used to assess a community's preparedness and willingness to address a specific issue or implement a particular intervention. Developed by researchers at the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University, it's a dynamic tool that recognizes that communities are at different stages of change, much like individuals.<sup>1</sup>
- **Five Dimensions of Readiness:** Within the Community Readiness Model, the five dimensions of readiness (Community Knowledge of the Issue, Community Knowledge of Efforts, Leadership, Community Climate, Resources) are the key areas assessed at each stage to provide a comprehensive understanding of a community's preparedness for a specific issue.<sup>1</sup>
- **Interactive Systems Framework for Dissemination and Implementation (ISF):** A conceptual model that describes how different, interconnected systems work together to effectively move research findings and evidence-based practices into real-world use. This model bridges the gap between scientific research and practical application in fields such as public health and prevention, recognizing that dissemination and implementation are dynamic processes that interact among various stakeholders operating within distinct yet interconnected systems.<sup>4</sup>
- **Motivation:** The willingness and initiative of individuals, organizations, and the community to engage in change efforts that address local health and well-being concerns.
- **Needs Assessment:** A process used to identify and understand the specific problems or gaps within a community that need to be addressed.
- **Process of Prevention:** The systematic and cyclical series of steps a community or organization undertakes to proactively reduce the incidence, prevalence, or severity of a health or social problem. A comprehensive approach that moves beyond reacting to issues, aiming instead to address their root causes and promote protective factors. This process includes 1) recognizing a community problem, 2) evaluating a community need, 3) choosing an evidence-based program, 4) implementing the program with fidelity and adapting according to best practices, 5) evaluating the program, and 6) sustaining program efforts over time.
- **Protective Factors:** Characteristics of an individual, family, community, or society that decrease the likelihood of negative outcomes.<sup>5,6</sup>
- **Risk Factors:** Characteristics of an individual, family, community, or society that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes.<sup>5-8</sup>
- **Stakeholders:** Individuals, groups, and organizations who are directly or indirectly impacted by 1) community issues and/or 2) change efforts to address these issues.

# References:



1. Colorado State University & Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research. (2014). *Community readiness for community change* (2nd ed.). [https://tec.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CR\\_Handbook\\_8-3-15.pdf](https://tec.colostate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CR_Handbook_8-3-15.pdf)
2. Chaskin, R. J. (2001). Building community capacity. *Urban Affairs Review*, 36(3), 291–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10780870122184876>
3. Aarons, G. A. (2006). Transformational and transactional leadership: Association with attitudes toward evidence-based practice. *Psychiatry Serv.*, 57(8), 1162–1169. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.2006.57.8.1162>
4. Wandersman, A., Duffy, J., Flaspohler, P., Noonan, R., Lubell, K., Stillman, L., Blachman, M., Dunville, R., & Saul, J. (2008). Bridging the gap between prevention research and practice: the interactive systems framework for dissemination and implementation. *American journal of community psychology*, 41(3–4), 171–181. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-008-9174-z>
5. Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (6th ed., pp. 793–828). Wiley.
6. Ungar, M. (2013). Resilience, trauma, context, and culture. *Trauma Violence Abuse*, 14(3), 255–266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838013487805>
7. Sameroff, A. J., Bartko, W. T., Baldwin, C., & Seifer, R. (1998). Family and social influences on the development of child competence. In M. Lewis & C. Feiring (Eds.), *Families, risk, and competence* (pp. 161–185). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers
8. Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., & Miller, J. Y. (1992). Risk and protective factors for alcohol and other drug problems in adolescence and early adulthood: implications for substance abuse prevention. *Psychological bulletin*, 112(1), 64–105. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.64>