

ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR STATE EPIDEMIOLOGICAL WORKGROUP

Having an active, well-represented, and sustainable state or tribal epidemiological workgroup (SEW/TEW) is often the first critical step toward engaging in a data-guided prevention planning process.

Yet many states, tribes, and jurisdictions continue to struggle with how to create strong, well-functioning workgroups, or to revitalize existing workgroups that may have become inactive after initial data analysis and needs assessment activities are complete.

This tool presents a four-step model that SEW chairs—or others responsible for creating or rebuilding their SEWs—can use to strengthen or revitalize their epidemiological workgroups.



ACTION #1: TAKE STOCK AND PREPARE

Before reaching out to invite individuals and organizations to participate in your workgroup, spend time thinking about available resources and what you want the group to accomplish.

Examine available resources.

You may want to consider the following:

- *What are the key agencies in your state, tribe, jurisdiction, or community that work to prevent substance use or related issues? For communities with fewer resources,*

this may be one or two individuals who understand data and are able to present data to lay people in the community.

- *What major projects or efforts are happening in your state/community to prevent substance use and related consequences?* Understanding the lay of the land will help you ask appropriate questions and begin to identify relevant data source.
- *What expertise, skills, or resources must your epidemiological workgroup collectively have or have access to?* Your epidemiological workgroup should include members with analytical and relationship-building skills, knowledge of system-wide prevention efforts, and/or access to data. It is unlikely that any one member will possess all of these characteristics, so be strategic when considering who to recruit.

Understand and be able to explain what you're about.

When you're first getting started, it's critical that you be able to describe, clearly and succinctly, the overall purpose of the group—who you are, what you do, and why the work is important. You will also need to convey to potential members how their participation will benefit the workgroup, and conversely, how participation in the workgroup will benefit them and/or their community. Consider developing a three-minute “elevator speech” to quickly convey your message. Some questions to help you do so include:

- *Why is it important to establish (or revitalize) this workgroup?*
- *How will it strengthen the community's substance use prevention efforts?*
- *How will the workgroup benefit from [name of potential member's] participation (i.e., why them)?*
- *How will [name of potential member] benefit from participation in the group (i.e., what is the value added)?*
- *What is the time commitment?*

ACTION #2: IDENTIFY AND RECRUIT POTENTIAL MEMBERS



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You can begin your recruitment efforts once you have a clear sense of who you want to recruit. Below are some questions to discuss with your prevention team to determine if potential members have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience you are looking for. You can begin your recruitment efforts once you have a clear sense of who you want to recruit. Below are some questions to discuss with your prevention team to

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Skills and Experience	Sample Questions
Knowledge of system-wide prevention efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the person’s experience and/or involvement with substance misuse prevention efforts happening in the state, tribe, or jurisdiction? • How much do they know about agencies and/or programs that also address prevention issues? • How much does the person know about populations experiencing disparate substance misuse outcomes? • What is this person’s understanding of social determinants of health and risk/protective factors associated with subsequent substance misuse?
Relationship-building skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the person partnered with other agencies to share data or strategically work together? • How comfortable are they with approaching others to discuss data or findings? • How comfortable are they with working with individuals from differing perspectives?
Analytical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the person’s experience working with small and/or large datasets? • Do they have experience using statistical software packages (e.g., SAS, SPSS, EpiInfo, SUDAAN, STATA, R)? Do they have access to data analytic software? • What is their knowledge and experience running data analyses such as frequencies, crosstabs, multivariate, or regression? • What is their experience with disaggregating data to investigate possible disparities and inequities?
Access to data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who owns the data that this person currently works with? • How are these data used? • What is the primary purpose of the database(s) this person maintains? • Are they willing to share a description or list of variables from their agency’s database? • Do they know how to get other types of data to supplement what they already have?

Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this person regularly share their data and/or data findings with other agencies, stakeholders, and community members who work on substance use prevention? If yes, how? • Have they produced any products (e.g., epidemiological profiles, reports, briefs, flyers) to “market” their findings? If so, how culturally responsive were those products?
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ACTION #3: GAUGE INTEREST AND DESIRE OF MEMBERS

Once you’ve established your SEW, it is helpful to periodically assess the needs/expectations of new and existing members. The questions in the table below can help you determine member interests, according to different workgroup functions.

Function	Sample Questions
Knowledge of system-wide prevention efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are members interested in belonging to a group that meets regularly to discuss substance use prevention data, databases, and/or data projects? • Are members interested in devoting meeting time to data presentations from other agencies? • Have members expressed an interest in accessing certain types of data to help them guide and strategize substance use prevention efforts? Which types of data are these?
Relationship-building skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do members find it useful having a group of colleagues with whom to consult on a range of state-, community, and/or population-specific (e.g., military, women, young adults) issues, and/or to work with on cross-agency projects? • Are members interested in discussing and working with others to overcome behavioral health data gaps and build equity-focused data infrastructure?
Analytical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any analytical skills members would like to offer that would further the mission of the group? • Are members interested in devoting time to data analyses using their own data or data from other agencies? • Are members interested in incorporating equity principles in their analyses, and in their reporting of data that influence public health decisions?
Access to data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are members interested in sharing and/or exchanging substance use prevention data across agencies/organizations?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of data gap(s) related to substance use indicators are members most interested in filling? • Are members interested in exploring data gap(s) related to?
Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have members produced any recent products (e.g., epidemiological profiles, reports, data briefs) to “market” their findings? • Have members shared their data and/or data findings with other agencies, stakeholders, and/or community members in the past? If yes, how? • What sort of state-level substance use prevention data products are members interested in using or producing? • Are members interested in assisting in translating data for practice?

ACTION #4: PROVIDE MEANINGFUL RESPONSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES



SEW involvement can be made more meaningful by engaging members in different levels of responsibility; as member responsibility increases and members are invited to participate more fully, the work of the group in general becomes more meaningful. The questions in the table below can help you identify meaningful responsibilities and opportunities for both current and prospective members.

Function	Sample Questions
Knowledge of system-wide prevention efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can members use information shared during workgroup meetings to better understand substance use prevention? • How can members use knowledge of system-wide prevention efforts to inform their data-related initiatives and products? • What types of feedback can members provide on data-related products?
Relationship-building skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are members willing to help shape/develop the state’s epidemiological profile or other data products? • How might members share workgroup data with other agencies, organizations, or people to increase stakeholder knowledge and/or buy-in of prevention efforts? • What key partnerships or networking can members help facilitate? • What partnerships can be fostered by members to ensure representation from agencies that have data on communities experiencing health disparities?

<p>Analytical skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which indicators do different members find most useful? Which indicators might they include in a state-, tribe-, or jurisdiction-level epidemiological profile? • How can the workgroup more effectively tap members knowledge/ experience to strengthen the profile or other data products? • What other data products are members interested in producing outside of the profile? • What types of analyses are members interested in conducting besides the ones that workgroup is currently engaged in?
<p>Access to data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might members benefit from having access to one another’s data?
<p>Dissemination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can members use the data and knowledge generated by the group to inform their individual agencies’ work? • What role can members play in helping to produce workgroup products (e.g., epidemiological profile, reports, briefs)? • What role can members play in helping to “market” workgroup findings and products?



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