

Vermont SPF-SIG Evaluation:

Summary of Key Findings (Preliminary)

March 30, 2012



Background

Funded by Vermont's Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (SPF-SIG), the Vermont Department of Health awarded SPF-SIG grants to 24 communities throughout the state.

All community grantees were required to focus on the prevention of underage drinking. Grantees selected either "high risk drinking among persons under age 25" or "marijuana use by persons under age 25" as their second priority. Four grantees chose the marijuana priority; the remainder chose high risk drinking as their second priority.

A third priority for all community grantees was to build their capacity to implement the SPF model, which included, in particular, the capability to implement evidence-based prevention strategies at the population level.

Because SPF-SIG communities collectively covered about 70 percent of the state's population, it is informative to examine statewide trends in the target outcomes, as well as to compare trends in SPF-SIG funded and non-funded communities.

Implementation of Strategies

The start date for implementation varied considerably across communities (from October 2008 to March 2010). Strategies were underway in most communities by the fall of 2009.

Communications strategies (e.g. media campaigns) made up the largest proportion of interventions implemented by communities (64%), followed by strategies that enhanced enforcement of underage drinking laws or drinking and driving (13%), strategies that worked to change local or state alcohol policies (12%), prevention education for parents or for youth in schools (8%), and comprehensive strategies that included components of several of the other types (3%).

The Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) completed assessments of how well each community implemented their selected strategies (implementation fidelity) on a scale of 0-3 based on available guidelines for implementation. Across strategy types, fidelity ratings ranged from a mean of 2.3 for communications strategies to 1.8 for policy change strategies. Fidelity scores varied widely across community grantees.

Organizational Capacity Development

Members of each community grantee organization were surveyed in 2008 and again in 2010 to measure change in capacity and functioning of the organization during the grant time period. The assessment showed that average capacity across coalitions increased in all areas from 2008 to 2010 and that representation of community sectors on the coalitions was very strong. Areas that could use improvement included funding and sustainability as well as coalition structure and membership.

Alcohol and Marijuana Use Outcomes

Sources of outcome data include:

- The 2003 through 2011 biannual YRBS (based on all schools that participated)
- The 2008 and 2010 Vermont Young Adult Survey (mail and internet survey conducted by PIRE)
- The 2008 and 2010 Core College Student Survey (based on colleges that participated both years)
- The Vermont Parent Survey implemented before and after the start of the 2010 statewide "ParentUp" media campaign (internet survey conducted by PIRE)

Findings from the YRBS Data:

- Statewide, the YRBS data show substantial and statistically significant decreases between 2007 and 2011 in past month use of alcohol and past month binge drinking among high school students.
- Statewide, the YRBS data show that past month marijuana use among high school students remained relatively stable between 2007 and 2011, although the rates were slightly lower than those observed earlier in the decade.
- Greater decreases between the baseline years (2003 to 2007) and 2011 for both any use of alcohol and binge drinking were experienced in SPF-SIG communities compared to those that did not have SPF-SIG grants. The difference in the binge drinking trend was statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.
- SPF-SIG communities that focused on marijuana as their second priority were more successful than non-funded communities in reducing marijuana use between the baseline years (2003 to 2007) and 2011. This difference was also statistically significant.
- Attributes of grantees that were associated with larger decreases in binge drinking include:
 - 1) they implemented their interventions with high fidelity;
 - 2) they had relatively higher organizational capacity scores; and
 - 3) they implemented a greater number of interventions.

Findings from the Young Adult Survey Data:

- Between 2008 and 2010, binge drinking statewide among young adults (ages 18 to 29) decreased slightly (from 57% to 55%) and marijuana use increased slightly (from 29% to 33%). Neither change was statistically significant, although the increase in marijuana use approached statistical significance ($p = .08$).
- Slightly better outcomes for both binge drinking and marijuana use were observed in the SPF-SIG communities compared to non-funded communities, although those differences were not statistically significant.

Findings from the Core Survey:

- Across all campuses participating in both years of the survey, binge drinking among college students decreased from 58.4% in 2008 to 54.2% in 2010.
- Marijuana use prevalence remained essentially unchanged (at 41.5%).

Findings from the Parent Survey:

- More parents of both middle and high school students strongly agreed that they know there are places in their community where they can learn more about how to prevent their child from using alcohol.
- More parents of high school students indicated that they strongly agreed that there are places in the community to get help if their child is using alcohol.
- More parents of both middle and high school students indicated that they had seen or heard information about what parents can do to prevent underage drinking.
- No statistically significant effects on parent behaviors (e.g., talking more with their child about alcohol) were found.

Comments

Overall, these preliminary findings regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the Vermont SPF-SIG are encouraging. All 24 community grantees successfully completed a prevention plan for their community and implemented one or more prevention strategies aimed at changing population-level indicators of targeted substance use priorities. As might be expected, the timing, number, and implementation fidelity of strategies implemented varied widely across the community grantees. The grantees also varied with respect to their levels of organizational capacity and their success in building capacity over the course of their grants. Collectively, however, grantees were successful in increasing organizational capacity in all areas we measured.

With respect to outcomes, SPF-SIG grantees were more successful in reducing the prevalence of binge drinking among high school students in comparison to non-funded communities. Furthermore, the subgroup of grantees focused on marijuana use experienced greater reductions in marijuana use among high school students than non-funded communities. Both effects were statistically significant. Other outcomes also were in the expected direction (i.e., greater relative reductions among SPF-SIG communities), but were not statistically significant. Those included any alcohol use among high school students and both binge drinking and marijuana use among young adults.

At the statewide level, it was also encouraging to see reductions in binge drinking among college students. Unfortunately, the same was not true for marijuana use. National data also indicate that progress in reducing the prevalence of marijuana use among both adolescents and young adults has stalled, and it may now actually be increasing.

Some interesting and useful findings have emerged from our analysis of community grantee attributes that are associated with success in reducing targeted outcomes. In particular, the number of strategies implemented, and also the number of strategies implemented with high fidelity, were both associated with greater reductions in binge drinking as based on the YRBS data. Community grantees that implemented their strategies with greater fidelity or that had high organizational capacity scores (at the follow-up measurement point in 2010) were also more successful in reducing binge drinking by high school students.

One significant challenge encountered so far has been deciding on how to use the 2009 YRBS data, which was collected after the community grantees were funded but before most of them had begun implementing community-based strategies (other than helping promote a statewide media campaign targeting middle school students). The data suggest that many SPF-SIG communities experienced reductions in targeted outcomes in 2009. In light of the implementation timing, however, we elected to use only 2011 YRBS data to assess outcomes, rather than infer SPF-SIG effects in 2009 when they may have been due to other causes.

This report was produced by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE), the independent evaluator for the SPF-SIG initiative. A complete report detailing findings from the evaluation is in progress and will be submitted in the near future.