

Guidance for hiring, training, and supporting community prevention practitioners

The qualities and abilities of a prevention practitioner are connected to the successful implementation of prevention programming. This document is designed to provide a potential model for the outreach, interviewing, and hiring process.

This can be used across various movements and focus areas; organizations looking to hire agents of social change may find many of the suggestions listed here helpful. For additional resources, see *Qualities and Abilities of Effective and Confident Prevention Practitioners* and the *Sample Job Description* offered by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. This document is organized into three sections related to each part of the hiring process: Outreach and Recruitment, Interviewing, and Training and Orientation. This process is flexible given an agency's needs and resources.

Outreach & Recruitment: Connecting with potential prevention practitioners

When reaching out to the community for a potential employee, think first of the qualities, abilities, knowledge, and experience you would like them to possess. Some possible questions for identifying these aspects could include:

1. Which communities are our agency's highest priorities for engagement and mobilization?

Effective prevention should saturate as many communities as possible - this can be done through social norms campaigns, individual-based education and skill-building, and community collaboration. Prevention should not be relegated to one specific community or type of community (e.g. schools or college campuses), but should work to shift larger community norms. When looking for someone to fill a prevention job position, they should have some level of comfort working across the lifespan: children, youth, adults, parents, individuals in later life, etc.

2. Should a potential applicant have a familiarity with the region? Would knowledge of community dynamics contribute to their success?

- Educating and training community groups, businesses, faith communities, and other populations



take in-person interaction, so travel may be a big part of the prevention practitioner's job. Familiarity with the region and the dynamics of your service area may assist them in program development and delivery. On the other hand, this may not be as much a priority as their knowledge of prevention* and effective community mobilization experience.

3. What are some upcoming projects or program goals you would like tackled? What skills would be necessary?

As stated above, community mobilization and knowledge of prevention principles is key to a long-lasting career in the anti-sexual violence movement. For more details on this, see *Qualities and Abilities of Effective and Confident Prevention Practitioners*. When planning specific projects, it may help to brainstorm some areas of focus. For example, if your agency has experienced some challenges engaging with local faith communities, knowledge of faith and interfaith collaboration may be something you look for in applicants. This doesn't necessarily have to be a requirement, but it can help in outreach and recruitment - you may head to a local seminary or higher learning institution to share job postings. If anything, it is an excellent way to recruit potential volunteers and supporters.

These questions help begin the process of narrowing your agency's focus on who is the best fit for the position. This is also a great strategy if you are looking for an evaluator or consultant for a grant-funded project, possible board members, or other agency staff positions.

Once you have worked through some of these questions, it may become clearer to you where to post and announce job openings. You may want to consider looking beyond the traditional settings (e.g., college Women's Centers, recent graduates specializing in education or child development) to others (e.g., faith communities, local businesses, or volunteer-led community improvement organizations). Posting job openings on your website (if available) and online social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter may also improve your outreach efforts.

** Although knowledge of prevention is an integral part of the prevention practitioner's day-to-day job responsibilities, this knowledge should also be integrated into all staff training and orientation. Counselors, advocates, administrators, and board members should have a practical and foundational knowledge of the principles of prevention and how they are implemented in their capacity within the organization. Guidance on this can be found in the Training & Orientation section of this document.*

Interviewing: Learning more and identifying strengths

The interview process provides the opportunity to not only gauge an applicant's interest in the position, but their skills, worldview, motivations, and chemistry with your agency. Although a multi-stage interview may not be conducive to filling a position quickly, it can help reduce the possibility of turnover or employee dissatisfaction.

Below is a model with possible interview questions for each stage. As stated above,



this can be modified to fit with your agency's approach and vision for a prevention position. More detailed guidance can be found in the *Evaluation for Improvement* document listed in the Resources section at the end of this publication.

Stage One: Interviewing all applicants and reviewing abilities and skills

After collecting resumes and letters of interest, contact qualified applicants and schedule phone or in-person interviews to review additional qualifications and experience. This phase of the interview process is to establish some expectations and a foundational understanding of job requirements. In addition to questions

regarding familiarity with agency services and presence, here are some additional questions to ask during this initial screening process:

1. A major focus of this job is on community engagement and coordinating events with adults and children in [service area] - how do you feel about interacting with a wide variety of individuals and groups when presenting programs or building partnerships? Please give an example of a time you have done this type of work.

As stated above, prevention programming requires collaboration and coordination with different communities and groups such as parents, professionals, individuals in later life, and individuals with disabilities. Any potential



applicants need to have some level of comfort working with diverse populations.

2. What motivated you to apply for this position?

Possible reasons should center on changing the community, engaging in activism, building community partnerships. It should not be entirely focused on teaching young children or students in a school setting.

3. How familiar are you with [service area]?

This is relevant if you decide this is needed for successful community mobilization and prevention programming implementation.

Stage Two: Interviewing top candidates for chemistry and philosophy

Once you have selected your top candidates, schedule an in-person meeting to have a discussion of values, philosophy, and approach to prevention. This phase of the interview process is to further explore the chemistry and “fit” between the individual and the agency, as well as provide some opportunities for her or him to demonstrate skills. Below are some questions that can help clarify some issues around anti-oppression philosophy:

1. Can you think of a time when you interrupted oppression in some way?

This will provide the applicant a chance to reflect on their own comfort with taking action and being an agent of change. This will also be a great opportunity to discuss bystander empowerment as an effective strategy for sexual violence prevention.

2. Which “ism” would be hardest for you to facilitate discussion around/discuss/talk to others about and why?

We all struggle with ending forms of oppression - this can be indicative of personal experiences and boundaries. By acknowledging some areas for growth, or some personal or professional boundaries, we all become better activists and advocates. This question is not intended to have the individual identify an “ism” they personally hold or struggle with; the question is opening a door for education and professional development.

3. What connection do you see between feminism and the work our agency does?

A basic understanding of feminist principles and the connection to violence prevention can be necessary for effective engagement and “buy in.” Although the applicant may not identify as a feminist or with feminism, familiarity and comfort with promotion of these connections is key.

4. Have you ever supported a cause in the face of resistance?

Much like questions No. 1 and No. 2, this experience will indicate the level of comfort the applicant has with taking action and engaging in community-level social change.

Stage Three: Final interview with leadership

For the final interview, provide the applicant with an opportunity to demonstrate education and training skills by conducting a presentation for key agency staff/leadership. Provide them with enough time and guidance for a competent presentation, but do not make the project so large that they need extensive research or resources. Some potential projects are provided below:

A. We would like to know more about how the law enforcement community sees our work and their perceptions of sexual violence. Tell us how you would collect this information. Also, how would you incorporate this information into a program or project to engage law enforcement?

B. Our agency has had some struggles/limited resources/limited success engaging local faith communities in violence prevention. How would you begin a conversation with these communities?

C. A local private religious elementary school has requested programming from our agency. They have a sexualized bullying problem and need guidance on promoting healthy behaviors. The only stipulation however, is that we cannot discuss “sex” or “sexual violence.” How would you adapt our approach to accommodate the request while still achieving our goals?

D. Our agency is hosting a parent engagement town hall meeting focused on child sexual abuse prevention. Some parents are requesting information on age-appropriate sexuality information, while others are passionately opposed. How would you mediate this conversation and refocus discussion on effective prevention?

Training and orientation: Setting new staff up for success

Training and orientation are keys to employee success and growth. In addition to required advocacy trainings, whether specific to sexual assault, domestic violence, or crime victims, principles of prevention should be included in staff (and volunteer) training. This ensures a stable and consistent understanding of prevention and implementation or prevention programming. For more details on qualities and abilities, see *Qualities and Abilities of Effective and Confident Prevention Practitioners*. This list of qualities and abilities includes resources for learning and ongoing development. These resources can also be relevant to other staff positions and responsibilities and may be useful for all staff in position planning.

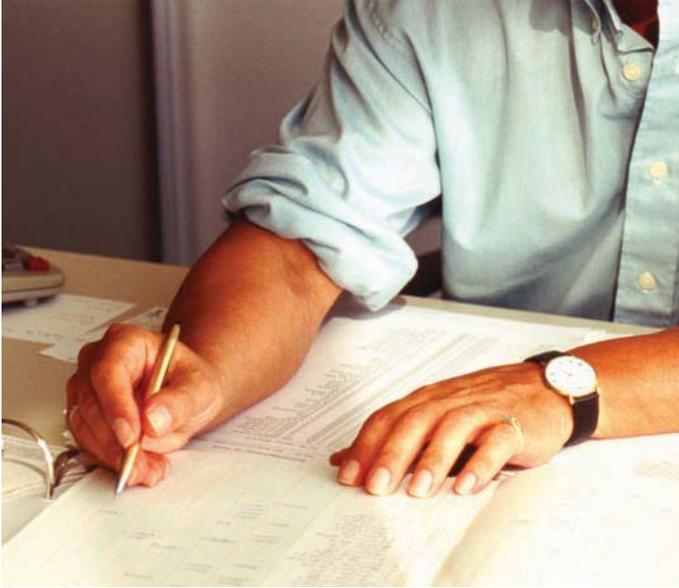
It may be obvious to most people, but staff stability and longevity are at the foundation of any long-term prevention work. Agencies must emphasize and institutionalize self-care strategies and burn-out prevention in order to create space where all staff feels comfortable setting boundaries and acknowledging limitations. New staff orientation that includes strategies to prevent burn-out set a standard or expectation of wellness. For more information on institutionalizing self-care and burn-out prevention, see the Resources section below and *Strategies for Integrating Prevention into Organizational Operations*.

About the authors

Liz Zadnik is Education & Resource Coordinator at the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR), and has worked in the violence prevention and reproductive justice movements as a community educator and organizer. She has her master's in community psychology and social change from the Pennsylvania State University.

Jennifer Grove is Prevention Outreach Coordinator at the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, and has worked in the anti-sexual violence movement as an advocate, counselor, educator, and prevention specialist for over 14 years. She coordinates the prevention outreach services of the NSVRC and provides training and technical assistance to sexual assault coalitions, departments of health, and other organizations working to develop and implement comprehensive, effective sexual violence prevention strategies.

This resource was created with the insight and expertise of **Stephanie Townsend, Ph.D.** Dr. Townsend has worked in the movement to end sexual violence for 19 years as both a practitioner and researcher. She began by working for community-based rape crisis and prevention programs in Michigan, California and Texas. Additionally, she served on the boards of directors of the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and on the advisory board of the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault.



Fisher, D., Lang, K. S., & Wheaton, J. (2010). *Training professionals in the primary prevention of sexual and intimate partner violence: A planning guide*. Retrieved from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/Training_Practice_Guidelines.pdf

Guy, L. (2006). *Re-visioning the sexual violence continuum. Partners in Social Change*, 9(1), 4-7. Retrieved from the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs: <http://www.wcsap.org/sites/wcsap.huang.radicaldesigns.org/files/uploads/documents/RapeCulture2006.pdf>

For developing staff and volunteer trainings and orientation, the following resources are online training tools to help in establishing clear expectations and providing an introduction to sexual violence prevention:

Prevent Connect eLearning Resources

<http://preventconnect.org/category/elearning>

Veto Violence: Principles of Prevention

<http://www.vetoviolence.org/education-pop.html>

Veto Violence: Dating Matters

<http://www.vetoviolence.org/datingmatters>

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs Prevention Orientation Online Course

<http://www.wcsap.org/prevention-orientation-online-course>

Resources

Bell, H., Kulkarni, S., & Dalton, L. (2003). Organizational prevention of vicarious trauma. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 84, 463-470. Retrieved from VAWnet: The National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women: http://vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/PrevVicariousTrauma.pdf

Cox, P. J., Keener, D., Woodard, T. L., & Wandersman, A. H. (2009). *Evaluation for improvement: A seven-step empowerment evaluation approach for violence prevention organizations*. Retrieved from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/evaluation_improvement-a.pdf



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NSVRC • 123 North Enola Drive, Enola, PA 17025
Toll free: 877-739-3895 • www.nsvrc.org • resources@nsvrc.org

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