

CREATING A SUSTAINABLE DEC RESPONSE

Break-out Group Summary & Notes

October 5, 2005

Lori Moriarty, Heidi Hendricks, and Brian Mattson facilitated a breakout group discussion of approximately 150 people at the 2005 National DEC Alliance Annual Conference in Washington, DC. The purpose of the discussion was to help participants consider the short and long-term outcomes of the DEC effort to specify the variety of service demands, the DEC principles used responding to these service needs, and the variety of potential techniques used by jurisdictions across the country to conduct work and achieve outcomes.

The discussion followed a plenary presentation where the facilitators explored the historical and future evolution of the National DEC effort with emphasis on core organizational features and community-based efforts to provide children with safe and productive lives. The discussion below weaves material from the breakout session with a summary of the following concepts:

- Core components of sustainability
- Challenges in sustaining DEC efforts
- Exploring DEC using key features of an organizational framework

I. Core Components for Sustainability

The three core components for local sustainability include the use of a common organizational framework, mapping core interagency processes, and providing effective interagency leadership. The general features of these components are discussed below.

Use a well defined organizational framework.

A well defined organizational framework (for example see Attachment A) can be a tool for exploring a variety of system planning, practice, and evaluation questions. Programs and organizations can use a framework to develop a common language and conceptual understanding of the many considerations involved in developing and evaluating effective practices. Common applications include:

- Developing decision-making structures and service delivery processes
- Defining key clients, e.g., drug endangered children
- Strategic planning across an organization or a system
- Assessing existing programs and practices to identify local resources and service gaps

When DEC partners have a shared definition and understanding of each component of the model as it relates to their integrated service approach, they are able to discuss the approach constructively to develop efficient and effective service delivery practices. Specifically, an organizational framework creates capacity for:

- Defining measurable outcomes
- Developing programs, activities, and processes to meet client, community, and system needs
- Conducting process, outcome, and impact evaluations of complex programs
- Learning across programs with different target populations and diverse approaches

- Understanding the relationships between core program components and outcomes
- Developing goals and distinguishing between programmatic goals and measurable/achievable outcomes
- Creating and evaluating collaborative and integrative capacity and activities
- Assessing existing organizational networks and supporting infrastructure and consequently, capacity to sustain, improve, and extend services
- Replicating programs across jurisdictions and with different populations
- Assessing and adapting programs for their impacts on specific target populations
- Integrating cultural philosophies and expectations into planning and service delivery processes

Map core interagency processes.

It is imperative for agencies working on processes that involve a variety of individual and system roles to clearly map the process together. These process maps may account for two perspectives, the perspective of the child/family and their interactions with the system and the perspective of the system and the variety of roles for interacting with the family. The process may include the method for conducting investigations, prosecuting cases, making case planning decisions, engaging the court, working with community groups, developing technology innovations, or creating communications plans. Regardless of the process, shared processes require a common understanding of how activity will proceed.

Leadership.

There are several leadership challenges to address in conducting cross-systems work. Some examples include:

- Establish long-term strategic direction for the entire system as well as agencies
- Develop long-term system capacity to provide services
- Establish and monitor inter-agency, system infrastructure for supporting services
- Assure that effective inter-agency work processes are established and maintained
- Monitor system performance
- Work cooperatively to establish a strong fiscal foundation for on-going service delivery

Leaders in cross-system initiatives are responsible for providing the following competencies to the change process:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Forming powerful, internal and external coalitions
3. Creating an inspiring vision of the future
4. Communicating and gaining commitment to the vision
5. Empowering others to act on the vision
6. Defining organizational performance measures and create short-term wins
7. Facilitating organizational alignment
8. Bringing the organizational culture, bringing about change successfully
9. Institutionalizing new approaches

In addition, integrated system efforts need the following forms of leadership:

- Staff leaders. Staff leadership provides the resources to pull the integrated effort together. Staff leadership also involves discovering solutions that are consistent with the expectations of the overall project team and bringing these ideas forward for discussion and improvement. Staff leadership also involves facilitating a process that leads the group through the issues and helps identify and prioritize an implementation agenda.
- Agency leaders. Agency leadership involves the participation of all agencies serving youth and families. The agency leaders need to share a stake in the outcomes and remove power and status issues from the project. These leaders provide the energy and support necessary to “bridge” the gap between front line worker ideas and policy changes that may be necessitated by implementation.
- Policy leaders. Policy leadership involves engaging the elected officials for the cities, the county, and the state in the work that we are doing. This is a two way street. The effort develops ideas from the system and promotes these for consideration to policy leadership. The policy leadership needs to understand these ideas and contemplate the needs and challenges for implementation. In order for this forum to be effective, there needs to be a facilitated dialogue regarding improvements in the system and inquiry and information sharing improvements. This dialogue should target a set of strategic and systematic policy improvements.

II. Challenges in Sustaining DEC Efforts

There are a variety of challenges in sustaining multi-disciplinary approaches like those inspired by DEC. During the initiation and early implementation stages, it is important for cross-system efforts to gain clarity regarding the purpose and future of the effort, the shared philosophical principles guiding the work, an understanding of existing practices and the ability to remain open to learning and changing in the interest of achieving the common vision.

Clarity of Shared Purpose & Future

Creating a unifying purpose of the DEC efforts and conceptualizing the future created by the DEC efforts are critical challenges in the evolution of DEC. DEC and its partners can use a unifying vision to help ensure that agency-specific activities are consistent with a common purpose and activities promote the consistent progress toward the desired future. Appendix B provides a graphic representation of the vision articulated in Washington, DC stating the vision of DEC: *to end the intergenerational transmission of problem behavior*. The diagram is a draft incorporating the principles of leverage also shared at the meetings in Washington, DC.

Common Philosophy

Philosophy, rationale, and principles are the filters used by all individuals in a shared system model to inform and interpret decision options. These philosophies must be articulated, negotiated, and adopted—within and across agencies—to ensure that practices align with the core principles and values of the integrated effort. DEC organizations are mechanisms to help facilitate this multi-disciplinary work.

Improving Existing Practice

To insure sustainability, interagency-practice changes must become central or core processes in the participating agencies work, replacing less efficient processes intended to perform similar functions. Specifically, DEC organizations can identify and assess effectiveness of practices, collect consistent data, and upgrade service delivery using evidence-based approaches. In order for agencies to realize some of the efficiency benefits of shared processes and objectives, improvements must replace, not add workload to participating systems. The interagency objectives will require individual systems to reengineer existing practices to align with collective agency objectives.

Creating a Learning Process

DEC organizations engaging one another to create more effective and efficient practices will need to create mechanisms for teaching, learning, modifying, and celebrating improvements. Integrated systems should develop meaningful data and information feedback loops and create a culture of learning—tolerant of failure—to ensure practices continue to evolve in response to better approaches and changes in the need and demand for service.

III. Exploring DEC using key features of an organizational framework

The discussion below provides an overview of five key features in the organizational framework in Attachment A. Each description is followed by input from the breakout group participants at the National DEC Alliance Annual Conference.

1. Outcomes

Outcomes are indicators of success. The outcomes are derived from alignment between the need for action, the principles guiding action, and the services provided. Outcomes are measurable; time limited statements about the performance expected from the implementation of the effort. These statements may include a mix of short and long-term objectives. Outcome measures are performance feedback to the effort and should include the variety of process and effectiveness dimensions necessary to assess areas needing improvement and areas of success.

Outcomes from the National DEC Session:

- Seamless system of delivery
- Make better legal cases
- Start new DEC programs
- Sharing information/protocols/processes
- Preventing later delinquency

- Flexible funding
- Having community take ownership
- Immediate outcomes (e.g., protecting kids) and long-term outcomes (e.g., creating opportunities for children and families—education, jobs, wages)

2. Expectations & Needs:

Expectations for a process are set by stakeholders, defined broadly, and capture the perceived need for a practice. They may be perceptual, legal, based in tradition, or developed through other thought structuring processes. Expectations are a departure point for action and generally clarify the performance requirements of the resulting action. Specific actions require articulation of the expectations into well defined needs. These needs are validated by qualitative and quantitative inquiry clarifying what action is needed, for whom or what, and in what amount.

Needs from the National DEC session:

- Identifying the service and information gaps
- Improve the continuity of data sharing
- Data collection and analysis
- Effective administrative leadership
- Limited resources
- Need for clear management protocols
- Collaboration on a local level
- Shared turf-requires social change
- Training and education
 - Cross training—health & developmental issues
 - Specialized training—e.g., foster parents, kinship
 - Effective strategies for drug treatment and client supervision

3. Rationale

The rationale is an expression about why particular action will result in the intended outcomes. A rationale may draw from shared principles, values, and knowledge. Rationales are filters that help shape and determine the competencies and activities in a process. There are many possible rationales available and what is important is that these rationales are contemplated, selected, and integrated into the effort.

The mission, vision, and values of a system or effort will include affirmations and interpretations of the rationale and may be used to interpret and guide decisions ensuring alignment between the need for service, the techniques used to provide services, and outcomes.

Rationales from the National DEC session:

- Stop intergenerational transmission of problem behavior
- Kids interests are paramount
- Community values affect outcomes
- Exacting appropriate punishment-holding offenders accountable
- Prevention—reduce the number of abuse cases based on drug abuse
- Use preventive strategies to manage workload

- Share resources
- Open system to feedback and ongoing assessment

4. Techniques

Techniques are activities that produce targeted outcomes. Techniques may be developed deductively from the rationale or inductively based on experience and tradition. Any particular technique may be evaluated to learn how well it performs. Effective techniques are desirable particularly when they are informed or form the rationale for the process and are well aligned with the expectations and assessed needs.

Techniques from the National DEC session:

- Medical protocols
- State & local protocols/guidelines
- Educate staff and community on issues
- Joint law enforcement & case worker interviews
- Drug courts and family courts
- Education of medical community
- Use of Community Assessment Centers
- Cross training
- Use of prediction to triage cases

5. Social Networks & Organizational Infrastructure

Social networks are connections inherent in social and individual efforts. These networks involve an interactive exchange between individuals and groups and the social contexts that they experience. The networks strength and variety have direct affects on the effort and may either inhibit or support the efforts success.

Organizational infrastructure includes the variety of practice and physical support required for the effort to be implemented. The infrastructure is technology, buildings, people, and equipment as well as the policies, planning, management, training, communication, and performance measurement necessary to ensure the development, management, and evaluation of the effort. Infrastructure is secondary to the alignment between expectations, needs, goals, rationale, techniques, and outcomes. As such, infrastructure is critically evaluated to ensure that there is clear alignment and justification based on the outcome objectives of the effort. In addition, infrastructure issues may be developed strategically to ensure a project's sustainability and replicability.

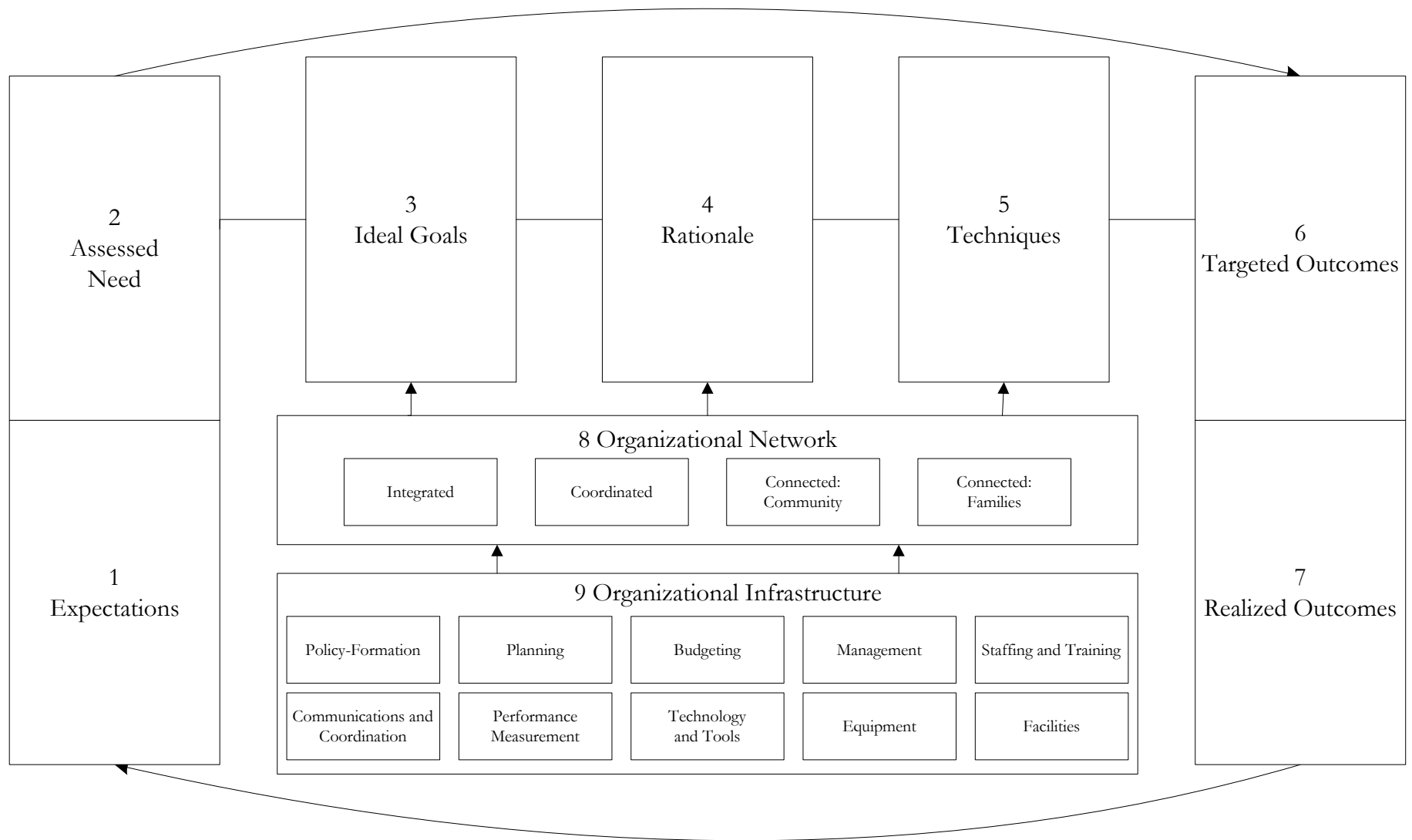
Social Network & Organizational Infrastructure from the National DEC session:

- Networking
- Empowering our partners—mutual invitation
- Communication within professions and across disciplines (e.g., OBGYN & Medical Directors)
- Communication structures
- communities work best time and task limited
- Partnering/relationships

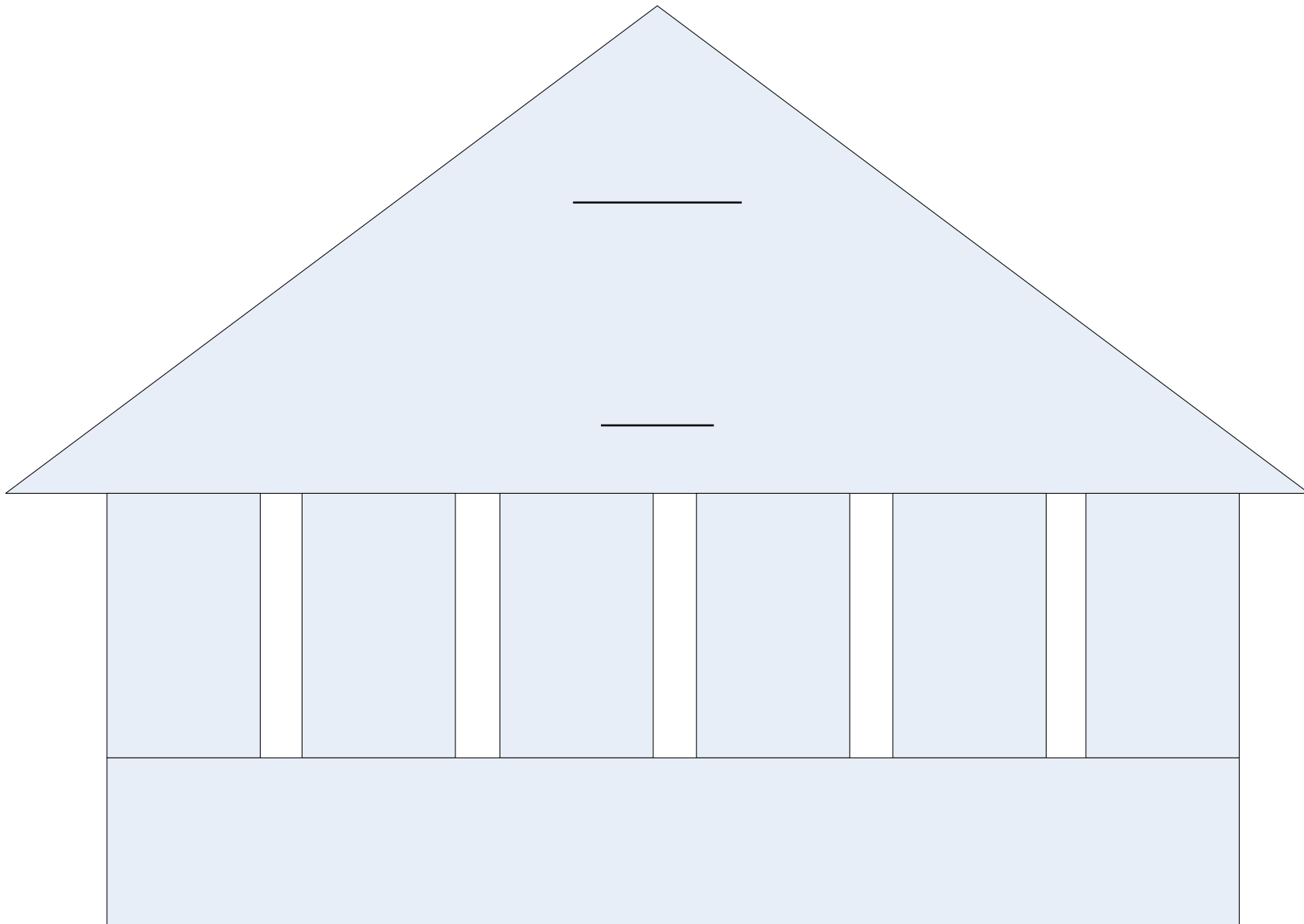
Next Steps

The discussion lead several participants to the idea of creating a DEC Interagency Planning Council where these and other leadership and multi-disciplinary capacity opportunities could be discussed. The group has representation from a broad spectrum of interests accounting for the variety of roles involved in working with children exposed to dangerous drug environments. The facilitators agreed to participate in the emergence of a learning dialogue to explore these considerations and promote ideas to the leadership of the National DEC Alliance.

Attachment A



Attachment B



Filename: DEC Annual Conference Summary 11.5.05.doc
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