

The Foundation Review

Volume 5
Issue 2 *Open Access*

2013

Implementation Guide for Community Change: Tools from First 5 Marin

Julia Coffman
Center for Evaluation Innovation

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr>



Part of the [Nonprofit Administration and Management Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Coffman, J. (2013). Implementation Guide for Community Change: Tools from First 5 Marin. *The Foundation Review*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1159>

Copyright © 2013 Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University. The Foundation Review is reproduced electronically by ScholarWorks@GVSU. <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr>

Implementation Guide for Community Change: Tools from First 5 Marin

Reviewed by Julia Coffman, M.S., Center for Evaluation Innovation

Community change initiatives (CCIs) are long-term, place-based efforts that offer comprehensive services to residents of poor communities. They seek transformational change by replacing piecemeal approaches to social problems with broader efforts designed to strengthen a community socially, educationally, economically, physically, and culturally.

CCIs have been around for many years, at least since the 1980s, and have been funded by both the public and private sectors. Supporters have included federal, state, and city governments, as well as many private foundations like the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Ford Foundation. Some of these efforts have been deemed more successful than others, but a belief has persisted for more than three decades in the power of community-based systems change as a mechanism for transforming communities and their residents (Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, & Dewar, 2010).

There is no such thing as a typical CCI. In fact, they do not even have a consistent label. Some are called comprehensive community initiatives, others place-based initiatives, and still others community development efforts. However, almost all have some things in common. For example, they feature long-term strategies that build on community assets and needs; incorporate local participation and leadership; aim for increased collaboration among social agencies; and seek change at multiple levels — individual, family,

neighborhood, and systems. This means that even though community change initiatives have different structures, services, and funding, they share common implementation and evaluation challenges.

*The Implementation Guide for Community Change: Tools from First 5 Marin*¹ offers practical advice for those engaged in the day-to-day challenges of funding, implementing, or evaluating community change efforts in all of their diversity and complexity. It distills 13 years of useful structures and tools from First 5 Marin, a community change effort in California's Marin County that uses state dollars from a tobacco surtax to improve the health and well being of children ages birth to 5. While an earlier article in the Fall 2012 issue of *The Foundation Review* (Coffey, Farkouh, & Reisch, 2012) offered lessons learned from this effort in the context of the broader community change field, this resource is about the nuts and bolts of the community change process.

The 67-page *Implementation Guide*, developed by First 5 Marin's long-term evaluation team at jdc-Partnerships in collaboration with First 5 Marin's executive director, is organized to be easily accessible. While the reader would benefit from reading it cover to cover in order to get familiar with its range and depth, the guide can be referenced quickly as distinct implementation and evaluation

¹ The guide is available at <http://first5marin.org/pdfs/evaluation/Funding%20for%20Change%20Implementation%20Guide%20Final.pdf>

needs or challenges arise during the community change process.

The guide has six chapters. The first two briefly cover foundational elements and overarching lessons for a CCI — core elements, challenges, and pitfalls. As these issues have been covered in depth in other articles by the same authors, the remaining four chapters are the real meat of the guide, organized by the initiative’s developmental stages — launch and start up, specializing and standardizing, integrating and disseminating, and finally renewing and regenerating.

Chapters 3 through 6 begin with a brief context of what happened during each of First 5 Marin’s developmental stages and why, and then quickly get practical. Specific tools or structures used during each stage are offered, along with visuals or examples of the tools when relevant. To give a better sense of how the process unfolded, tools are presented in the order they were developed. Each tool or structure is classified and inventoried in a consistent way, so it is clear what it is, why and how it was developed, what was useful about it, and how it has been refined over time.

The tools and structures described — 19 in all — serve a variety of functions. Some are for communications, convening, or data collection. Others are frameworks or policy statements that outline rules of engagement. For example, in addition to the familiar theory of change and logic models that many CCIs develop for framing and data collection purposes, the guide offers less commonly seen companion materials like an implementation framework that organizes all of the initiative strategies and a theory of action developed in a later developmental stage of the initiative. Evaluation materials also are abundant, and include the evaluation framework used, evaluation report examples, and data collection materials (e.g., report and database structures, survey questions).

The guide offers enough detail to get a feel for the tools and structures, without overwhelming readers with detail that may be less relevant to their

experiences. Each tool is described and illustrated in no more than three pages.

This is not a how-to or step-by-step guide for successful community change initiatives. The authors developed it knowing that some of their advice, tools, and structures would not be relevant to all community change efforts. It does, however, demonstrate how First 5 Marin responded to challenges that every community change initiative faces — organizing a very complex change process, framing an evaluation and organizing data collection to assess it, communicating about it so all partners are on the same page, and developing structures that help partners learn and refine along the way. While not every initiative will want to respond in the same way as First 5 Marin, this guide offers useful reference points and example approaches for these common challenges.

Finally, this guide demonstrates, albeit somewhat implicitly, the role that evaluation can and should play throughout a community change initiative’s lifetime. As the authors note at the guide’s beginning, the community change process is “iterative, dynamic, and messy.” As such, it needs to learn and adapt over time. The tools presented here, many of which were developed by First 5 Marin’s evaluation team in collaboration with other First 5 Marin partners, demonstrate how evaluation can support that adaptation through every stage of the community change process.

References

- COFFEY, J.D., FARKOUH, N., & REISCH, A. (2012). Dimensions of change: A model for community change efforts. *The Foundation Review*, 4(3), 42-64.
- KUBISCH, A.C., AUSPOS, P., BROWN, P. & DEWAR, T. (2010). Community change initiatives from 1990-2010: Accomplishments and implications for future work. *Community Investments*, 22(1), 8-12.

Julia Coffman is founder and director of the Center for Evaluation Innovation.