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(Opening Slide – Reentry Network/Coalition: How to make them matter. Lena Hackett, MPH; Community Solutions Inc.)

My name is Lena Hackett. I'm from Indianapolis. And in Indianapolis, Marion County we are in our 10th year of a reentry network, reentry coalition, and we have taken that experience to different sites I would say just across the state of Indiana but also across the country to help folks figure this out.

So, what I want to talk to you guys today is what to look for when you're in a site that says they have a reentry network or a reentry coalition, as I've looked at these and applied for these federal funds very frequently, they say, this should be connected with your reentry task force is the word they used, or you should be creating a reentry task force. And so, I want to talk a little bit about that takes some time and energy, so how do you do it so that it matters?

(Slide 2 Displayed at this time: What's in a Name?) (0:45)

And it's all in this name. So there are a lot of things that this can get called, a reentry coalition, a reentry network, a steering committee, a task force, and what people are calling it matters, especially how they define that. So if you walk into a site, I think very important is to get their perception of what is this group of people who they are convening for what purpose?

(Slide 3 Displayed at this time: Definitions of a Steering Committee and a Task Force) (1:09)

So steering committee and task force are very task oriented, they're very limited in their scope and they tend to be a chosen group of people selected typically because they've always been the chosen group of people that have worked on this issue.

They're handed priorities to get done typically from an authoritative body of some kind and their job is to make sure that those tasks that they've been handed get done. Oftentimes, especially with a steering committee, those are not the people who are closest to the work by far.

They may be the prosecutor of the county or the public defender, or even the director of public health and safety who really are not anywhere near boots on the ground. And so, while they can execute a task it's really not a great definition of what we're looking for in terms of a reentry coalition or network.

Task force is really the same way. A task force by its definition is typically temporary and is given a task, get this thing done, report back to us in six months that you got it done, and then they dissolve.

(Slide 4 Displayed at this time: Definition of a Coalition and a Network) (2:18)

So what we're really looking for is a coalition or a network, and I would propose a hybrid of these two things.

So just by definition a coalition is about moving to action and it's about putting into the room or into membership of the coalition a diverse group of people who come at an issue for a common reason but maybe not from a common angle or a common viewpoint. But you want them to come together to leverage what their view and their lens is.

It's a little bit different than a network because network by its definition is really about information sharing. And again, you're pulling in a group or a system of people that's fairly diverse, but

what you typically get out of a network is people's learning is increased. They're learning things, they're becoming more aware of resources, they might get connected to people, but there's nothing really inherent in a network that moves work forward. And if you're going to go to all of the trouble in a site to help them form a reentry group, it should matter. And the coalition is the golden ring in my opinion.

(Slide 5 Displayed at this time: What you must have – Key Ingredients – Is there a targeted result to be achieved) (3:28)

So what do you have to have? And I heard some language about this as you guys were doing scenarios, you got to have a targeted result. So all of these folks have to know why they're in the room and what that result is, and it's the only reason they're in the room.

So in Marion County, the result that the reentry coalition is around is that all people who have been involved in the... Who have been touched by the criminal justice system, are able to be successful in their communities.

So that result is about adults and it's about Marion County, and I can't tell you how many times people try to get this group to talk about juveniles and prevention. It's just a different room full of people. So that result that everyone in the room knows what they're doing has to be determined. And it can often be determined by the mayor or the governor or whoever got awarded the grant and presented to the group in the room, but they've got to buy into it.

If any of you have had the pleasure of trying to get a mission statement done with a group of people, walking in there and saying what result do you want to achieve will be another layer of hell for you with that. So I would propose bring it to them and start with that. Because it's not really rocket science.

(Slide 6 Displayed at this time: What you must have – Key Ingredients – Are there Indicators (data) to measure Success? And can that data identify disproportionate impact?) (4:43)

And then again... And I heard this language as you were solving your really complex problems in your scenarios, can you measure that result? Will they know if they're making progress? Will they know if they've succeeded?

You've got to be able to have that data or some proxy data or you have to find a different kind of result, because if the group doesn't know if they're making progress they could work for three years towards something as a coalition, and then find out those three years of their lives didn't matter.

So we have to find the indicators to measure their success, be able to measure it repeatedly, and be able to present it back to them so that everything they're doing is based in that data.

So as you can tell from these things we're looking at a reentry coalition that is population level. So we're not looking at a reentry coalition whose job it is to make sure whatever grant was just awarded gets awarded well, that's a task force or a steering committee.

If a reentry coalition or network is formed well and formed strongly it then becomes that for every federal grant that community receives, and that is how they all get linked together.

(Slide 7 Displayed at this time: What you must have – Key Ingredients – Equal Power across the members, Attention to disproportionate impact/equity, Infrastructure – Neutral facilitation) (5:53)

And this is key, there has to be a level playing field in the room. There has to be equal power. No winners, no losers, no one who gets to trump with their opinion. And this is hard for some folks perhaps

who wear black robes. It is hard for some folks who perhaps work for a governor, but they can manage it. They can figure it out.

So most important in this is that every voice is equal and you're working with a consensus model, because if you vote by majority on issues you're going to address somebody loses. If you make the group come to consensus, everybody buys into something that may have been a hybrid of what was originally proposed but now you have the power of the group.

So this equal power piece is in my opinion a non-negotiable, and you have to start right from the beginning paying attention to disproportionate impact. So whatever data you're measuring it's got to be able to be cut so that people can see where is this impacting, what population?

Because eventually this group is going to develop strategies and this group of people in the room are going to implement them. They're not going to hand a plan to the director of reentry in the mayor's office and say, "Here's what you should do." The people you're going to put in the room are going to make commitments to do it. So they need to understand where their power is.

And then infrastructure, it's got to be supported. It can't be every third Wednesday of the month, everybody comes on a brown bag, brings their lunch and we're all going to talk about it, because you do that in January. And then you know what happens, you come back in February and you have that exact same conversation again. And pretty soon fewer people are coming to your coalition meeting.

So it has to have an infrastructure, it has to have someone who's convening and facilitating and that person needs to be neutral. It is really hard if the director of reentry is facilitating these conversations because that person should have an opinion and that opinion should be in the room.

If they're helping everybody else have opinions they just can't do that. So it needs to be invested with a neutral facilitator in there at least for the first 12 months.

(Slide 8 Displayed at this time: Membership – Who should be in the room? System partners, Community/faith-based partners, Policy makers/advocates, People with lived experience, Community leaders) (7:59)

So, who should be in this room? There's nobody on this list that's a surprise to any of you. So yes, you want all your system partners across your system, across all the intercepts of your sequential intercept model, all your criminal justice system partners, policy makers, the toughest people to get in the room are people with lived experience. Because this is a group that moves to action, you want this coalition to move to action.

What works well is if you have an advocacy group of people with lived experience, because then they have some meat on them where they can move to action. It is really hard for an isolated individual to be really effective in a coalition because they don't have anywhere to go with the work. So they're very important. That population is very important in the room, but it takes a little bit of art to get them in the room and to get them where they feel like they are able to have an impact.

In Marion County, in addition to all of these we have employers in the room, and we have the Indy Chamber of Commerce in the room because those are pieces that those folk feel they have an investment in reentry and they come to the conversation in a different angle and they can move their work through their sphere of influence.

(Slide 9 Displayed at this time: Membership – Who should be in the room? Members should be authorized to make commitments and move to action) (9:12)

But once you get all those people in the room, you have to make sure their bosses know they're in the room, and what's expected of them. Because as these coalition meetings happen people are making commitments to action. Your neutral facilitator is recording those and holding people accountable at the next meeting.

So if you don't have the power to make a commitment to action and you have to say, "Well let me go back to my office and see if we can do that," it stalls everything. It really knocks everything sideways. So being authorized to be in the room and make decisions is really important. So it requires a little bit of work. You map out who you want in that room, you map out who's got to give them permission to be in the room.

And what will happen is some people will be told they're going to be in the room, but I will almost promise you those folks will come grudgingly the first three times, and if this is done well this will be an experience they've never had before and they will be the first ones in the door. Because this is not the way the community really does their work usually.

(Slide 10 Displayed at this time: What Happens Next? Orientation to the work, Education of members, Strategy Development – Action Commitments) (10:14)

So, what happens next? Everyone in the room has to spend some time getting oriented to the work, because again, they all come to it through their own doors. You can't even expect partners in the criminal justice system to know what's going on in the entire system because the public defender knows what a public defender knows, the jail knows what a jail knows. And they can spin out some yarns about what they think happens in other people's systems but they all need to be oriented to the work and community partners need to be oriented to what the criminal justice system really looks like and where are the potential opportunities to engage.

And you have to educate these folks on what are best practices, this is not a, "Here, let's just throw this idea out and let you all start to think as if we don't know," you want to supply them with data. You want to supply them with best practices. You want to supply them with everything you know so that they can figure out how that's going to work in the community they're in.

And from there now you're just into what we're all really pretty comfortable with, what are we going to do? What's our strategy development? What's our work plan? The difference here is nothing gets done if someone in the room doesn't commit to do it.

So this is not a room where I go in and I say, "Wouldn't it be great if we could do X?" And if no one in that room agrees with me or says, "Yes, I'll help do that," or "Yes, we can do that," and moves to action, it just gets written on a piece of paper and not lost, but it doesn't move. Everything in the room is about somebody committed to do it. And usually they committed to do it in partnership with someone.

That can be a little bit of frustration because you will know things that should be getting done, that this room isn't moving forward, but none of them are going to move to action if it's not their own work. I often talk about this as everybody comes onto the dance floor, throws all their work into the room and then gets up on top of the balcony and looks down and tries to figure out how it all gets mashed together.

So it's about getting up on the balcony, looking down at the system and figuring out what the connections are, and then those folks have to make those decisions.

(Slide 11 Displayed at this time: It's important to remember – This does not happen overnight, It requires staffing and support, And it requires a deliberate commitment from all members) (12:22)

It does not happen overnight. I think Roger and I both said, "Marion County reentry coalition is in its 10th year." I would say it took us three years to get any decent traction and then we just maintained water for another three or four years, and in the last several years nothing happens in Marion County, Indianapolis around reentry that the question is asked, "Have you talked to the reentry coalition? Have you gone to a reentry coalition meeting? What does the reentry coalition think about that?"

From the funders, to the mayor, to the governor, that's what happens. And it's a really powerful position for not any one individual but for that entire room, for that entire room to move work forward. It is worth it in terms of staffing and support because one of the things it does is, if there is an issue that needs to be addressed, that's about the prosecutor's office and the deputy prosecutor who's in the room knows it, he doesn't have to step up front or she, he's got a reentry coalition that's going to move that issue forward.

And he or she is part of the coalition but he's not at risk, there's cover there. And the power of that lets everybody put their baggage at the door and move forward.

Another thing that's interesting to have in the room is you really want middle level people because they're not responsible for their agency's budget, they're not responsible for how angry or happy the mayor is. They're not responsible for standing in front of city county council. They've just been doing this job for 10 years and figured out there's a better way to do this.

So it is a much more pliable audience of membership there. And a lot of times they can do a lot of stuff because nobody really pays attention to them.

So this is a deliberate commitment from all members, and if your experience is anything like ours has been you will convene folks, and after about three months you'll lose three or four of them because this is hard work. And it's about doing it differently and not everyone can hang with that.

But the folks who stay in the room are there with quite a renewed passion and energy and commitment, and so it really doesn't slow the work down. And honestly, you don't want them in the room if they're not going to plow and row with you.

(Slide 12 Displayed at this time: How do you get there? Time. Invest time in developing members. Relationship building, Skill development, Facilitation, Proposal-based decision making, Leadership from the chair) (14:44)

So again, you got to have the relationship building, you got to have the skill development, and even skill development in the room on how do they... How are they facilitators from the chair? How do they hold neutral? How do they make a proposal in terms of a decision they want to have made and move that proposal forward?

Because many times these folks are used to just saying, "Go do it," and somebody does it. So this whole idea of make a proposal to the group and negotiate it is new to them. So you have to give them some training in it.

(Slide 13 Displayed at this time: How do you get there? Time. Invest time in developing members. Collect and analyze the data about the system. Spend time letting the members review, ask questions, and interpret the data) (15:20)

Data, data, data, data, data, put it all up on the room. We call it the war room. Let people see it because people don't know anybody else's data but their own if they know their own.

(Slide 14 Displayed at this time: What are the keys to success? Focus on the result, Equal power for all, Action agenda with accountability, Authorization to make to action, Strong infrastructure) (15:33)

So these are the keys to success. So you got to staff them, you got to prepare them, and you got to hold them accountable. So if you go into a site or get a call from a grantee, these are just some key questions that I would ask.

(Slide 15 Displayed at this time: What to look for? Is the role/purpose of the Network/Coalition focused on a population level outcome or oversight of the grant?) (15:47)

What's your purpose? What do you want this network or coalition to do on a population level? And if you have a site that really is only ready to do a task force or a committee, start with that, but help them continue to grow and figure out what their impact could be.

(Slide 16 Displayed at this time: What to look for? Is the Network/Coalition "authorized" to do the work?) (16:03)

Are they authorized? Are the people in the room got permission to be in the room and permission to make decisions?

(Slide 17 Displayed at this time: What to look for? Has the grantee "mapped the system of players" to make sure key partners are represented?) (16:11)

Have they mapped the system of players so that they are reaching outside of the normal folks who walk in the room? Have they looked at the employer that seems to hire quite a few people with criminal histories and maybe they want to be in the room? Have they truly, really expounded their boundaries?

(Slide 18 Displayed at this time: What to look for? Does the diversity of the membership reflect the diversity of the community?) (16:26)

Does the diversity of the membership reflect the diversity of the community? [comment from the audience "Say that again"]. And does it reflect the diversity of the folks who have been touched by the criminal justice system?

(Slide 19 Displayed at this time: What to look for? What role do the people most impacted by the system have in the Network/Coalition?) (16:41)

What role do the people most impacted by the system have in this network and coalition? And oftentimes if you have an individual who's interested in working on it, train them as a neutral facilitator. It will be hard for them to be a member if they don't have a place to do that work in but they make great facilitators, because they don't have any allegiances to any of the agencies in the room.

(Slide 20 Displayed at this time: If done right, this is a game changer because the Coalition brings a collective voice to lead reform) (17:04)

Lena Hackett Presentation Reentry Week Transcript

It is worth it. This is my last slide. If this is done, this can be a game changer because you get a grant, it's a three-year grant. It's a wonderful thing to have happen but it goes away. So, with a powerful reentry coalition there's lots of stuff you can do that costs nothing, that's about collaboration, and those relationships between partners are really what gets you to systemic reform.

(Concludes 17:30)

Closing Slide:

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