m DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Developing Strategies for Social Connection to Promote Mental Health and Wellbeing

This guidance document was developed for leaders of multi-sector community coalitions who are facilitating a process to improve social connection in the community. These leaders are responsible for bringing together diverse stakeholders, engaging the community, and guiding efforts to better understand the social connection challenges and opportunities, ultimately working toward improving mental health and preventing suicides.

Social connection is a vital protective factor for mental health and suicide prevention. Supportive relationships provide a sense of belonging and emotional stability, helping people combat isolation and despair. When connected, people are more likely to seek help and engage in positive coping during crises. Strong community ties foster resilience, enabling people to support each other and reduce the risk of mental health crises escalating into suicide. The strategies in this document aim to help community leaders strengthen social bonds, reduce isolation, and promote mental well-being. For more information on the healing power of social connection, please visit the full advisory from the Surgeon General: Advisory: The Healing Effects of Social Connection (https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html) (https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html).

Goals of the guidance document

▪ Increase Capacity: Equip coalition leaders with the tools and resources to effectively understand and address social connection issues within your coalition's identified population(s).

▪ Foster Understanding: Provide a structured process for collecting data and insights about the social dynamics and challenges affecting priority populations.

▪ Develop Intentional Strategies: Guide leaders through designing, implementing, and evaluating strategies tailored to improve social connection within the community.

Step-by-step guidance and resources for facilitators

This document is designed to guide coalition leaders through the process of improving social connection in their communities. By following these steps, you will gain the knowledge and tools to understand social connection needs, access existing resources, and develop effective, sustainable strategies. Each step includes guidance and practical resources to support your efforts, adaptable to your community's unique needs. If you already have a strategic plan in place, use this document to learn more about social connection within your community and ensure that strategies fill identified gaps, leverage existing resources, and support the overall objectives of your broader plan.

Building social connections depends on the community's context and the coalition's capacity. Whether your coalition is pursuing a short-term or long-term effort, this guidance can be tailored to develop a focused strategy or a comprehensive approach, based on your goals, resources, and community needs.

Follow these key steps to understand social connection, access resources, prioritize strategies, and create an action plan:
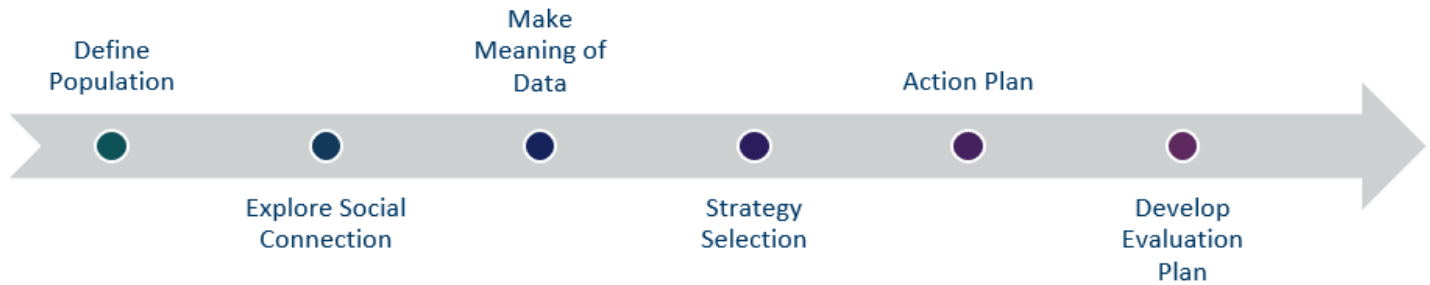
- **Step 1: Identify priority population**: In this step, you'll identify which groups in your community need support in building stronger social connections. This could be based on factors like age, health, economic status, or social isolation. Gathering data through conversations and research will help you pinpoint the communities that are most in need.

- **Step 2: Map connection and community resources**: This step focuses on understanding how social connection looks within your priority population and identifying the resources that currently support it. You'll gather data from community members to understand where people find connection, what barriers exist, and what spaces or support are needed to foster connections.

- **Step 3: Plan – Making meaning of your data**: After collecting data, it's time to analyze it. Look for patterns, concerns, and opportunities for improvement in social connection within your community. This step is about understanding the issues at a deeper level and identifying potential areas for action.

- **Step 4: Select strategies – Moving from planning to action**: Once you have a clear understanding of the needs, strengths, and opportunities, this step is about choosing the right strategies to address those needs. You'll brainstorm ideas, consider evidence-based practices, and assess what will work best for your community.

- **Step 5: Action – Turning strategies into action**: Now that you've selected your strategies, it's time to create an action plan. This plan will outline the specific steps needed to implement each strategy, assign roles, allocate resources, and set timelines for completion.

- **Step 6: Evaluation – Reflecting on progress and impact**: Evaluation is an ongoing process to assess the impact of your strategies. In this step, you will create a plan to measure how well the strategies are working and whether they are making a positive impact on social connection within your community.

Step 1: Identify priority populations

As a community coalition leader working to promote mental health and prevent suicide, defining and identifying your priority population is the essential first step in building effective strategies to foster social connection. By focusing on those who are most at risk for social isolation, mental health struggles, and suicidal ideation, you ensure that your efforts are targeted, relevant, and impactful. The priority population may include people or groups facing unique challenges that put them at higher risk of social disconnection or mental health crises, such as those experiencing mental illness, trauma, or other social vulnerabilities.

Populations to consider when defining your priority group

Consider the following populations when identifying your priority group. These groups may face increased risk of mental health struggles, isolation, and suicide:

- **People with mental health conditions:** People living with depression, anxiety, or other mental health challenges are at higher risk for isolation and suicide.

- **Youth and young adults:** Adolescents and young adults may struggle with peer relationships, bullying, or identity issues that contribute to mental health struggles.

- **Older adults (seniors):** Seniors, especially those living alone or in rural areas, may experience loneliness and social isolation that can lead to depression or suicidal thoughts.

- **LGBTQIA+ individuals:** This population may face unique stressors, including discrimination and lack of support, leading to higher rates of isolation and mental health issues.

- **Veterans or military families:** These groups often experience social disconnection after returning from service, compounded by trauma and mental health challenges.

- **People with substance use disorders:** Social isolation can be a significant barrier to recovery, and people with substance use disorders may face stigma that further isolates them.

- **Rural communities:** Geographic isolation can exacerbate social disconnection and mental health challenges in rural areas.

- **Cultural communities**: People from specific cultural, ethnic, or immigrant backgrounds may face additional challenges such as language barriers, cultural stigma, and limited access to culturally relevant support services, which can contribute to social isolation and mental health struggles.

Gathering data to define your population

To identify your priority population, it's essential to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. This will help you understand who is at the highest risk for mental health issues, social disconnection, and suicide. Collect data from the following sources:

- **Local health data:** Review statistics related to mental health diagnoses, suicide rates, and social isolation trends from local health departments or mental health organizations.

- **Community surveys and assessments:** Use surveys to gather direct input from community members about mental health needs, social connection, and perceived barriers to support.

- **Focus groups and interviews:** Engage community members, especially from vulnerable populations, to understand their personal experiences with social isolation and mental health.

- **Local suicide data:** Work with public health and local authorities to assess the suicide rate, suicide attempts, and other indicators to identify high-risk populations in your community.

- **Determinants of health:** Consider factors such as income, housing instability, unemployment, and access to healthcare, as these can influence mental health and social isolation.

Action steps for the facilitator

Compile the data

- Organize the data you have gathered into clear, concise categories (e.g., demographic information, risk factors, social connection data, mental health statistics, etc.).

- Choose a format that will be easiest for your coalition to understand and engage with. Some options include reports, PowerPoint presentations, etc.

Share the findings

- Present the compiled data in the format that is most appropriate for the audience. Ensure that it is accessible to all coalition members (e.g., email the report, upload to a shared platform, present live at a meeting).

- Make sure to emphasize the key findings, which populations are at greatest risk for isolation, mental health issues, or suicide, and what data supports this.

- Offer summaries or executive summaries for stakeholders who may not need to dive into the full data set.

Plan for a facilitated conversation with the coalition

- Use the following potential facilitated questions to guide the conversation with the coalition after sharing the data. These questions will help the coalition process and analyze the information to ensure that the most at-risk populations are prioritized for action. Below are some sample facilitated questions:

  - Understanding the data and community needs:

    - What patterns or trends do we notice in the data regarding the most vulnerable populations? Are there any surprising findings that challenge our initial assumptions?

    - Which populations have the highest risk factors for mental health challenges, suicide, or social isolation, according to the data?

    - How do the identified risk factors (e.g., mental health conditions, health determinants, geographic isolation) relate to the overall wellbeing of the priority population?

  - Contextualizing the findings:

    - Based on the data, how do local issues (such as poverty, discrimination, lack of services) affect the mental health and social connections of these populations?

    - Are there specific geographic areas within the community where these populations are more concentrated?

  - Prioritizing populations for Action:

    - Given our resources and capacity, which population should we prioritize in our initial strategies to address social isolation, mental health, and suicide prevention? Why?

    - Are there populations that may not be immediately prioritized but still require attention? How can we plan for future efforts to support them?

Step 2: Map social connection and community resources

In this step, your coalition will focus on understanding how the priority population experiences social connection and map existing community resources that support social engagement. Through conversations, data collection, and mapping local assets, you will gain insight into the current social connection landscape. This will help identify strengths, uncover barriers, and lay the foundation for targeted interventions that can strengthen social bonds within the community.

Action steps for the facilitator

Engage with the priority population

- Begin by initiating conversations with people in the priority population. (See Appendix 1 for a sample community conversation guide.)

- Determine how the coalition would like to have these conversations. They could be through focus groups, surveys, or informal interviews.

- Develop a plan and guide for coalition members to facilitate the conversations. Below are a few sample questions:

  - How would you describe the ways you feel close to or supported by friends, family, or others in your community?

  - What barriers prevent you from experiencing social connection (e.g., transportation, isolation, discrimination)?

  - What support or spaces do you need to foster stronger social connections?

- Ensure that the conversations are inclusive and encourage participants to share their personal experiences and needs regarding social connection.

Gather data through community asset mapping

- Community asset mapping is a way to identify and document local organizations, spaces, and networks that support social connection (ways in which people connect with each other formally and informally).

- Begin the asset mapping process to identify resources that can support social connection. These might include community organizations, physical spaces, or networks that already provide opportunities for individuals to connect. (See Appendix 2 for a sample template.)

- Consider existing support systems, such as local health services, volunteer organizations, social clubs, and informal networks (e.g., neighbors helping each other).

Analyze and document the findings

- Compile the information gathered through the conversations and asset mapping. Identify key patterns, challenges, and opportunities.

- Document any gaps in social connection that need to be addressed, as well as the resources and assets that could be leveraged to enhance social connection efforts.

Step 3: Plan – Making meaning of your data

After completing community conversations, data collection, and asset mapping, you now enter the critical phase of synthesizing and analyzing the data you've gathered. This step is about pulling together the findings to understand the bigger picture of social connection in your community, identifying key trends, uncovering root causes, and spotting opportunities for improvement. By making meaning of the data, you'll be able to define the main issues, leverage community strengths, and focus on areas that require immediate attention. The goal is to move from insights to action, setting the stage for designing targeted strategies that address social connection gaps and needs in your priority population. (See Appendix 3 for Data analysis and planning template.)

Action steps for the facilitator

Determine how to share the findings

▪ Determine the best way to present the findings from Step 2 with the coalition by considering the best format that works for your group, such as a report, PowerPoint presentation, community summary, or by incorporating visual methods like photovoice to highlight key themes. Discuss the data, highlight the most significant barriers and opportunities, and brainstorm potential strategies for improving social connection.

Analyze the data

▪ Present the information gathered in Step 2, which includes community conversations, surveys, asset mapping, and other data sources gathered in Step 1.

▪ Develop facilitated questions for your coalition to determine the problem. Below are sample questions that could be posed:

  ▪ What surprised you or confirmed your assumptions from the data presented?

  ▪ What story does this information tell us about social connection within your priority population?

  ▪ What are the key issues, concerns, or trends that community members reported regarding social connection? Examples: lack of spaces for youth to connect, elderly people feeling isolated, or discrimination in social spaces.

  ▪ What are the key issues or trends related to social connection discovered through the conversations and data analysis? Examples: transportation barriers impacting participation in social activities or high rates of mental health challenges in certain demographic groups.

Identify root causes

▪ Dive deeper into the findings to uncover the root causes of social connection challenges.

▪ Develop facilitated questions to explore community strengths and assets. Below are sample questions that could be posed:

  ▪ Are there structural issues (e.g., lack of transportation, financial hardship) contributing to isolation?

  ▪ Are there cultural or social factors, like stigma or discrimination, that need to be addressed?

Highlight community strengths and assets

▪ Recognize existing strengths and resources. Identify local organizations, spaces, networks, or individuals that are already fostering social connection. These assets can be expanded or leveraged to build stronger social ties in the community.

- Develop facilitated questions to explore community strengths and assets. Below are sample questions that could be posed:

  - What community assets have been compiled from the asset mapping exercise?
    Examples: Local community center with meeting spaces, active neighborhood groups, or supportive religious organizations.

  - What trends related to social connectedness have been discovered through the review of existing data (e.g., mental health trends, participation rates in social activities)? Examples: Rural areas have limited access to social activities, high rates of social media usage but low in-person interaction.

Determine priorities for action

- Prioritize issues based on the data analysis. Which areas need immediate attention? Where are the opportunities for improvement or growth? Focus on actions that can address the most urgent needs or those that leverage existing community strengths.

- Developed facilitated questions to explore priorities on which the coalition could act. Below are some sample questions that could be posed:

  - Based on the findings, which areas of social connection need immediate attention? Examples: Create more accessible transportation options, build social spaces for seniors, help schools build strong relationships with all students.

  - What opportunities exist to strengthen social connection, using existing assets or community strengths? Examples: Partner with local businesses to offer safe gathering spaces, leverage community center resources to host regular social events.

- Compile a list of opportunities for improvement or action.

Collaborative sharing of findings

- Present your findings to the broader community and stakeholders. Sharing the synthesized data fosters transparency, promotes community ownership of the process, and ensures that the next steps are based on collective input.

Reflect on and document insights

- Take time to reflect on the data, key findings, and feedback received during the analysis phase. Document these insights to inform the creation of targeted action plans in future steps. This documentation can be used to guide the coalition in identifying the strategies that will best address the social connection challenges in your community.

Step 4: Select strategies – Moving from planning to action

After gathering and analyzing the data, you now have a clearer understanding of the state of social connection within your community. Step 4 focuses on selecting effective strategies to address the identified needs while leveraging existing community strengths. The aim is to choose strategies that are actionable, impactful, and sustainable. These strategies can range from evidence-based practices to innovative community-driven initiatives, all designed to improve social connectedness in your community. (See Appendix 4 for the Strategy Selection Template.)

Action for the facilitator

Review identified needs and community strengths

- Look back at the data. Revisit the key findings and priorities identified during the analysis phase. What issues and opportunities stood out the most? Which areas are in most need of intervention, and where can you build on existing community assets to foster stronger connections?

- Reflect on the strengths of your community. Focus on how you can use the identified community assets and strengths to address the needs. For example, if the community already has active neighborhood groups, consider how they can play a role in fostering social connection.

Brainstorm potential strategies

- Gather your coalition and community partners. Host a brainstorming session to generate ideas on how to address the identified needs. Encourage creative, out-of-the-box thinking. This can include new initiatives, partnerships, or even adaptations of existing programs.

- Be open to diverse approaches. Strategies can range from informal community meetups to more formal programs or events, based on the local context. Don't limit yourself to traditional methods—sometimes unconventional solutions work best.

- Develop a set of facilitated questions to determine efforts and supports for potential strategies. Below are some sample questions that could be posed: Who do you currently partner with that could help put our strategy ideas into action? Examples: Local youth programs, faith-based organizations, school systems, community health centers, community partners.

Consider evidence-based, evidence-informed, and promising practices

- Evaluate existing practices. Consider strategies that have already shown success in similar communities. Evidence-based practices are supported by research and have been proven to work. Evidence-informed strategies adapt proven models to fit your community's specific needs. Promising practices have demonstrated early success but may still need testing and refinement.

- Adapt proven strategies. Where possible, look to incorporate these successful strategies into your plan, but be prepared to adjust them based on the unique characteristics of your community.

- Review the Surgeon General's recommendations on incorporating additional strategies across sectors within the community. These resources can be found following this section.

- Develop a set of facilitated questions to determine what strategies could be considered. Below are some sample questions that could be posed:

  - Which evidence-based, evidence-informed, or promising practices could potentially address the issues identified in your community? Examples: Community-based social clubs for seniors, youth mentorship programs, mental health support initiatives using peer educators.

Assess feasibility and impact

- Evaluate the feasibility. For each potential strategy, assess how practical it is to implement. Consider available resources (funding, space, personnel), the capacity of your coalition, and potential barriers such as community resistance or logistical challenges.

- Assess the potential impact. Consider the potential outcomes for each strategy. Will it address the most critical needs? How will it contribute to improving social connectedness in your community, and how will you measure success?

- Develop a set of facilitated questions that could be posed to understand feasibility and impact. Below are some questions that could be posed:

     How feasible is each potential strategy? Examples: Community centers are already available and could host social events, youth sports programs require additional funding and staff.

     - What will be the likely impact of each strategy? Examples: Increased engagement in social activities among older adults, improved social skills and emotional well-being in youth, expected impact.

Prioritize and select strategies

- Based on the assessment of feasibility and impact, prioritize the strategies that will have the most meaningful and immediate effect. Be realistic about what can be accomplished with the available resources and within the desired time frame.

- Balance short-term and long-term strategies. Select a mix of strategies that can have immediate effects and those that will contribute to long-term change. Consider starting with smaller, manageable actions that can grow over time.

- Develop a set of facilitated questions that could be posed to help prioritize and select strategies:

     - Which strategies should be prioritized based on available resources and their potential impact? Examples: Start with monthly social gatherings at local community centers, launch a transportation assistance program for seniors to attend social events.

Incorporate flexibility

- Remain flexible. As the implementation progresses, community needs may shift or new opportunities may arise. Keep an open mind and be willing to adapt the strategies as needed. Regularly reassess and adjust your approach based on feedback and ongoing data collection.

Step 5: Action- Turning strategies into action

Now that you've selected your strategies for fostering social connection within your community, it's time to turn them into tangible action. A detailed action plan will help you map out the steps necessary to implement these strategies, assign responsibilities, allocate resources, and establish timelines. This plan will serve as the roadmap for your coalition's efforts, ensuring clarity, accountability, and focus as you work towards building stronger social connections. (See Appendix 5 for a strategy selection template.)

Action for the facilitator

Define clear objectives

- Set SMART objectives. Each strategy should have specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives. These objectives will clarify what success looks like for each strategy and provide clear benchmarks for progress. For example, if you're planning to host a community event, a SMART objective might be to host a community gathering with at least 100 participants by December 31.

- Ensure alignment with priorities. Make sure each objective ties back to the identified community needs and strengthens social connection.

Identify key actions and tasks

▪ Break down each strategy into actionable steps. These are the tasks required to achieve the objectives. For example, if one of the strategies is to create a new community event, tasks could include booking a venue, creating promotional materials, and recruiting volunteers.

▪ Assign roles and responsibilities. Designate team members or community partners to take responsibility for each task. Make sure everyone knows their role and what is expected of them.

Allocate resources

▪ Identify necessary resources. Consider the time, money, volunteers, and materials required for each strategy. Be clear about what you have and what you still need. This could include funds for events, space for meetings, or personnel to help organize activities.

▪ Secure resources. If resources are lacking, explore potential funding sources, partnerships, or community contributions. This could involve seeking grants, donations, or enlisting volunteers to help with implementation.

Establish milestones and timelines

▪ Identify key milestones that will mark progress along the way. These should be tangible checkpoints that indicate how the implementation is going. For example, securing the venue could be a milestone, as could completing promotional materials.

▪ Establish a realistic timeline for each strategy. This will help ensure that tasks are completed on schedule and that progress is measurable. Consider starting with short-term milestones that lead to the larger goal.

Ensure community engagement

▪ Engaging the community throughout the implementation process is key to success. Plan regular updates to keep community members informed and involved. This can include newsletters, meetings, or community forums.

▪ Encourage participation. The more people are engaged, the more successful your strategies will be. Be proactive in seeking input, feedback, and active participation from the community throughout the implementation phase.

Anticipate challenges and risks

▪ Identify potential challenges. Consider what might go wrong during implementation. Are there any external factors, like funding cuts or resistance from certain community groups, that could hinder progress?

▪ Create mitigation strategies. Develop contingency plans to address these challenges. For instance, if a venue falls through, identify backup options ahead of time.

Create a sustainability plan

▪ Plan for the long-term. Think about how to keep the strategies going beyond their initial implementation phase. What will it take to sustain the efforts over time? Consider building long-term community support, securing ongoing funding, and embedding the strategies into local institutions or systems.

▪ Focus on community ownership. Ensuring that the community continues to support and drive these efforts will help ensure sustainability.

Step 6: Evaluation- Reflecting on progress and impact

Now that you've put your strategies into action, it's time to see how well they're working. Evaluation is about checking whether your efforts are making a real difference and if you're meeting the goals you set. It's also about learning from your experiences, so you can keep improving your work as you go along. (See Appendix 6 for an evaluation plan template.)

Action for facilitator

Decide what success looks like

- Set clear goals. Think about what you want to achieve with your strategies. For example, you might want to see more people attending social events or hear that people feel more connected after participating in a program.

- Choose what to measure. Pick a few things to track, like event attendance, how people feel about their social connections, or whether people are showing up more often.

- Develop a set of facilitated questions that could be posed to the coalition, below is a sample.

Pick the best ways to measure success

- Ask for feedback. Use simple tools like surveys or feedback forms to ask people how they feel about your activities.

- Track numbers. Count how many people come to events or join programs.

- Talk to people. Have small group chats (focus groups) or one-on-one interviews to hear how people are feeling and if they've seen improvements.

Collect the data

- Stay on track. Check in at different points (like after an event or halfway through a project) to see how things are going.

- Ask lots of people. Make sure to get feedback from different groups – event participants, local partners, and community leaders – so you get a complete picture of what's working.

Look at the results

- Analyze the numbers. Look at your surveys, attendance numbers, and participation rates. Did you meet your goals? Were there any unexpected results?

- Listen to people's stories. Read through the feedback from interviews or surveys to understand people's feelings. Did they feel more connected? Were there any common complaints or suggestions?

Share what you've learned

- Be open. Let the community know what you found out. Share both what worked well and what didn't. This keeps everyone in the loop and helps people feel involved.

- Get more feedback. Have a community meeting or send out a report to share what you've learned and ask for more input on how to improve.

Make changes if needed

- Based on what you've learned, make changes to improve your strategies. If something isn't working, try a new approach or fix what's not going well.

- Keep improving. Always be open to tweaking things as you go along to make sure the community's needs are being met.

Plan for the future

- Think long-term. Make sure your efforts can continue even after the first phase. Think about how to keep the momentum going, get ongoing support, and keep people involved.

- Keep checking in. Regularly reassess the strategies to ensure they're still helping the community.

We want to hear from you

This toolkit was developed in collaboration with the Minnesota Suicide Prevention Taskforce. We would appreciate your feedback on the usefulness of this resource. Please take a moment to fill out our survey: Survey Link (https://survey.vovici.com/se/56206EE3706DA052)

Appendix 1- Community conversation guide

Note: *This interview guide is intended as a template. Questions can be adapted to reflect the population and priorities of your community coalition.*

Introduction

I am here to talk to you on behalf of the [insert name of coalition or organization]. We are conducting community conversations to better understand social connection, particularly in promoting mental health and wellbeing. The goal is to gain insight into the experiences, perceptions, and recommendations of community members. This will help us design interventions that promote wellness, strengthen social connections, and prevent suicide and substance misuse.

[Insert any additional information about you or your coalition's work in suicide prevention and fostering social connection that you would like others to know.]

Our [insert name of coalition or organization] will use the information gathered to guide our prevention work. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are not required to answer any question you don't feel comfortable with. Your responses will be summarized with key findings from other interviews and shared with our planning team.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview questions

1. **Can you tell me a little about yourself?** Please share anything you'd like me to know about you and your role in the community.

2. **I am going to be asking you questions about "your community."** Our coalition defines community as [insert your coalition's definition, e.g., a group of people connected by shared geography, culture, identity, or interests]. Which community do you most identify with? (e.g., town, neighborhood, cultural group, etc.)

3. **What resources do we have in this community to support people across the lifespan?** Consider different age groups: elementary, middle, high school, ages 18-24, adults, and older adults.

   ▪ Who are these programs or services available to?

   ▪ Where are there gaps in programming or services?

   ▪ Are there groups of people, particularly youth or older adults, who are not participating or unable to participate in these resources?

   ▪ How accessible are these programs for people with specific needs, such as language support, disabilities, or cultural considerations?

4. Where are informal interactions happening in the community?

   ▪ Where do people of all ages spend their time (e.g., children, youth, adults, older adults)?

   ▪ How, if at all, are community members engaging with people across generations in those spaces? Consider employers, libraries, transit, parks, places of worship, senior centers, etc.

5. Of the places we just described, where are people of all ages experiencing the most relational support?

   ▪ How could that be strengthened? Where are the gaps?

6. How is leadership being supported in these spaces across all ages?

   - How might our community create more opportunities for people of all ages, especially youth and older adults, as leaders and contributors?

7. In our community, what are the opportunities for people of all ages to connect with culture and build a sense of identity?

   - How could that be strengthened? Where are the gaps?

8. What opportunities exist for people of all ages to build skills or positive values in the community?

   - How could that be strengthened? Where are the gaps?

9. In the spaces people navigate, where, if at all, are there concerns about psychological or physical safety?

   - Are there groups we are more concerned about (e.g., youth, LGBTQIA/2S+ individuals, Native communities, older adults, individuals with disabilities, or those experiencing homelessness)?

   - How could these concerns be addressed?

10. What are your most pressing concerns about wellbeing that our coalition should be aware of, across the lifespan?

11. Based on our conversation, where could we focus our efforts to strengthen social connection and build assets across the community for all ages?

Wrap up

12. Are you interested in getting involved in the work of the coalition? How would you like to participate moving forward?

13. **Are you aware of, or have access to, any data that would help us in this project?** For example, does your organization collect information on mental health, social connection, or related risk and protective factors?

14. Are there other people you think we should interview?

15. Would you be interested in receiving a summary of key findings from our interviews?

16. **What else would you like to share?**

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 2- Community asset mapping

Instructions for use

- **Resource name**: Name of the resource, organization, or space.

- **Type of resource**: Identify whether it's a physical location (e.g., community center), an informal network (e.g., neighborhood group), or a service (e.g., mental health support).

- **Location/accessibility**: Provide the address or general location of the resource and note its accessibility (e.g., wheelchair access, public transportation availability).

- **Target population**: Identify which groups are served by the resource (e.g., seniors, youth, families).

- **Notes/opportunities**: Include any relevant notes such as services offered, hours of operation, challenges, or opportunities to leverage the resource for enhancing social connection (e.g., partnership potential, needs for improvement, gaps in services).

Community asset mapping template

Resource Name	Type of Resource	Location/Accessibility	Target Population	Notes/Opportunities
Example: Local YMCA	Community Center	123 Main St. - Accessible by bus	All ages	Offers youth programs, exercise classes, and community events.
Example: Neighborhood Support Network	Informal Network	N/A – Community-based	Seniors, families	Local neighbors offering rides, grocery help. Needs a formal meeting space.
Example: Local Library	Public Space	456 Elm St. – Wheelchair accessible	All ages	Hosts free reading programs, youth workshops. Could expand outreach to isolated groups.

Additional sections for community asset mapping

Assessment of gaps:

- Identified gaps: Based on the assets mapped, identify any gaps in resources or services for key groups in the community.

- Opportunities for expansion: Where could existing assets be leveraged or expanded to serve additional populations or needs?

Identified Gap	Potential Solution/Opportunity	Responsible Party/Organization	Timeline
[Insert Identified Gap]	[Insert Solution or Opportunity]	[Insert Responsible Party]	[Insert Timeline]
[Insert Identified Gap]	[Insert Solution or Opportunity]	[Insert Responsible Party]	[Insert Timeline]

Potential partnerships:

▪ Identify local organizations, groups, or entities that could be key partners for filling gaps or enhancing the use of community resources.

Potential Partner	Resource/Service Offered	Potential Role in Asset Mapping	Contact Information
[Insert Partner Name]	[Insert Resource or Service]	[Insert Potential Role]	[Insert Contact Info]
[Insert Partner Name]	[Insert Resource or Service]	[Insert Potential Role]	[Insert Contact Info]

Appendix 3- Data analysis and planning template

Instructions for use

Use this template to document the analysis of your data and share findings with your coalition and community.

Complete the sections based on your discussions and prioritize issues for action.

Involve diverse community members in the sharing and reflection process to ensure broad participation and input.

1. Share the findings with the coalition

How will you present the findings to your coalition?
   Select the format that best suits your group:

- Report

- PowerPoint presentation

- Community summary

- Photovoice (visual data representation)

Facilitated questions for discussion:

- What are the most significant findings from the data?

- What format would help our coalition best understand the findings?

- How can we ensure the findings are accessible to the community?

2. Analyze the data

What are the key findings from your community conversations, surveys, and asset mapping?
   (Summarize the major trends or insights gathered)

- **Key trend 1:** [Insert key trend or issue]

- **Key trend 2:** [Insert key trend or issue]

- **Key trend 3:** [Insert key trend or issue]

Facilitated questions for reflection:

- What surprised you or confirmed your assumptions from the data presented?

- What story does this information tell us about social connection within your priority population?

- What are the key issues, concerns, or trends that community members reported regarding social connection?

3. Identify root causes

What are the root causes of the challenges identified?
   (Consider structural, social, or cultural factors contributing to isolation)

- **Root cause 1:** [Insert root cause]

- **Root cause 2:** [Insert root cause]

- **Root cause 3:** [Insert root cause]

Facilitated questions for exploration:

- Are there structural issues (e.g., lack of transportation, financial hardship) contributing to isolation?

- Are there cultural or social factors, like stigma or discrimination, that need to be addressed?

4. Highlight community strengths and assets

What community strengths or resources can be leveraged to improve social connection?
(Identify local organizations, networks, or programs that can support your efforts)

- **Asset 1:** [Insert community asset]

- **Asset 2:** [Insert community asset]

- **Asset 3:** [Insert community asset]

Facilitated questions for exploration:

- What community assets have been identified through asset mapping?

- What resources, individuals, or organizations are already contributing to building social connection?

- What trends related to social connectedness have been discovered in the data (e.g., participation rates, mental health trends)?

5. Determine priorities for action

Which issues or opportunities should be prioritized for action based on the data analysis?
(Rank areas that need immediate attention or could be strengthened using existing assets)

- **Priority issue 1:** [Insert priority issue]

- **Priority issue 2:** [Insert priority issue]

- **Priority issue 3:** [Insert priority issue]

Facilitated questions for prioritization:

- Based on the data, which areas of social connection need immediate attention?

- What opportunities exist to strengthen social connection using existing assets or community strengths?

- Which actions can be implemented quickly and have the greatest impact?

6. Collaborative sharing of findings

How will you share the findings with the broader community and stakeholders?
(Select a communication method and plan)

- Host a community meeting

- Create a community newsletter

- Use social media to share findings

- Other: [Insert method]

Facilitated questions for reflection:

- How can we share these findings with the broader community to encourage participation?

- What platforms or communication methods will work best to engage community members?

7. Reflect and document insights

What are the key insights or lessons learned from the data analysis phase?
(Summarize the major takeaways from the analysis)

- **Insight 1:** [Insert insight]

- **Insight 2:** [Insert insight]

- **Insight 3:** [Insert insight]

Facilitated questions for reflection:

- What are the key takeaways from the data analysis?

- How can we use these insights to inform the strategies we will develop in future steps?

- What improvements can we make to our data collection and analysis process for the future?

Appendix 4- Strategy selection template

Instructions for use

Step 1: Review the identified needs and strengths, providing a clear understanding of community priorities.

Step 2: Brainstorm a range of possible strategies that might address the identified needs and draw on community strengths.

Step 3: Assess each strategy's feasibility and potential impact by evaluating resources, coalition capacity, barriers, and expected outcomes.

Step 4: Prioritize strategies based on their feasibility and impact, selecting those that best align with community needs and available resources.

1. Review identified needs and community strengths

Identified needs:

- List the priority risk and protective factors your community has identified.

Community strengths:

- List the existing resources, strengths, and assets that could support the strategies.

2. Brainstorm potential strategies

Possible strategies:

- List the strategies your coalition and community partners have brainstormed. Consider strategies that are evidence-based, evidence-informed, or promising practices.

3. Assess feasibility and impact

For each strategy, evaluate its feasibility and potential impact based on the following questions. This assessment will help determine whether the strategy can be successfully implemented and if it will likely achieve the desired outcomes.

Feasibility

- **Available resources**: Does your community have the necessary funding, space, and personnel to implement this strategy? (e.g., Community centers are available to host social events, youth sports programs require additional funding and staff.)

- **Capacity of coalition**: Does the coalition have the organizational capacity to carry out the strategy? Do they have enough volunteers, staff, or partners?

- **Potential barriers**: What are the potential barriers to implementation? Consider community resistance, logistical challenges, or any gaps in resources. (e.g., Resistance to new youth programs due to lack of trust in outside organizations, logistical challenges in coordinating community events.)

Potential impact

- **Critical needs addressed**: Will this strategy address the most critical needs identified in the community? (e.g., This strategy will engage more seniors in social activities, helping to reduce isolation.)

- **Impact on social connectedness**: How will this strategy contribute to improving social connectedness in the community? (e.g., The strategy will connect older adults through community events, fostering a sense of belonging.)
- **Measuring success**: How will success be measured? What outcomes are expected, and how will progress be tracked? (e.g., Tracking participation rates and surveying older adults for changes in wellbeing.)

Instructions for filling out the table

- **Strategy**: Write the name or description of the strategy.
- **Feasibility rating (1-5)**: Rate the feasibility of the strategy (1 = very difficult to implement, 5 = very easy to implement).
- **Impact rating (1-5)**: Rate the potential impact of the strategy (1 = minimal impact, 5 = significant impact).
- **Potential barriers**: Identify any obstacles or challenges that could affect the implementation of the strategy (e.g., lack of funding, community resistance, resource limitations).
- **Expected impact**: Briefly describe the expected positive outcomes of the strategy (e.g., increased social engagement, improved mental health outcomes, etc.).

Strategy	Feasibility Rating (1-5)	Impact Rating (1-5)	Potential Barriers	Expected Impact
Strategy 1	(1-5)	(1-5)	[list barriers]	[describe impact]
Strategy 2	(1-5)	(1-5)	[list barriers]	[describe impact]
Strategy 3	(1-5)	(1-5)	[list barriers]	[describe impact]
Strategy 4	(1-5)	(1-5)	[list barriers]	[describe impact]

1. **Prioritize strategies based on feasibility and impact**

- **Evaluate each strategy's feasibility and impact** resources, coalition capacity, and barriers; alignment with needs, potential to improve social connectedness, and measurable outcomes.
- **Rank the strategies** by scoring their feasibility and impact on a scale of 1 to 5.
- **Select the strategies** with the highest feasibility and impact scores, aiming for at least one strategy from each category (feasibility and impact).
- **Make your final selection** by choosing strategies that best meet community needs, have the necessary support, and are most likely to achieve the desired outcomes.

Sector-specific resources from the Office of the Surgeon General

The Office of the Surgeon General provides a framework for a National Strategy to Advance Social Connection, which calls for action essential to our nation's health, safety, and prosperity. Individuals and organizations can use this framework to address the public health problem of social disconnection and strengthen social connection.

Resources, toolkits, and guidelines are provided that are tailored for use by individuals, parents and caregivers, community-based organizations, schools, workplaces, healthcare and public health, governments

and philanthropy groups to guide efforts to improve social connection and mental health within their area of influence.

- Office of the Surgeon General Social Connection Resources (https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/resources/index.html)
    - Social connection handouts:
        - What is the importance of social connection? (https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-social-connection-individuals.pdf)
        - What is the importance of social connection in children? (https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-social-connection-parents-and-caregivers.pdf)
        - What is the importance of social connection in schools? (https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-social-connection-schools.pdf)
        - Six Pillars to Advance Social Connection (https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-social-connection-graphic-pillars.pdf)
        - Factors That Can Shape Social Connection (https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-social-connection-graphic-factors.pdf)

Appendix 5- Action plan template

Instructions for use

- **SMART objectives**: Each strategy should have clear, measurable, and achievable objectives. Fill out the SMART table to define your goals.

- **Tasks and resources**: Identify all tasks and responsibilities, along with necessary resources. Use the allocated resources section to ensure that each strategy is adequately supported.

- **Timelines and milestones**: Set concrete milestones and establish realistic timelines for your actions. Make sure your team is clear on deadlines.

- **Community engagement**: Think about how to keep the community engaged and ensure their input throughout the process.

- **Challenges and risks**: Be proactive in identifying potential obstacles and have contingency plans in place.

- **Sustainability**: Outline steps to ensure long-term success and ongoing community engagement.

Strategy title:

[Insert Strategy Name]

1. Define clear objectives

What are the SMART objectives for each selected strategy?

Objective	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-Bound
[Insert Objective]	[Insert Specific Goal]	[Insert How You'll Measure]	[Insert Feasibility]	[Insert Relevance]	[Insert Deadline]

2. Identify key actions and tasks

What are the specific tasks for each strategy, and who will be responsible for each one?

Task	Responsible Person/Team	Deadline	Notes
[Insert Task]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Insert Deadline]	[Insert Additional Notes]

3. Allocate resources

What resources are needed to implement each strategy, and how will they be obtained?

Resource	Amount/Quantity	Source/How to Obtain	Status (Secured/Needed)
[Insert Resource]	[Insert Amount/Quantity]	[Insert Funding Source/Method]	[Secured/Needed]

4. Establish milestones and timelines

What are the key milestones and deadlines for each strategy?

Milestone	Deadline	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Milestone]	[Insert Deadline]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

5. Ensure community engagement

How Will You Engage the Community Throughout Implementation?

Engagement Activity	Target Audience	Frequency	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Activity]	[Insert Target Audience]	[Insert Frequency]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

6. Anticipate challenges and risks

What potential obstacles or risks could affect the success of the action plan?

Risk	Impact	Mitigation Strategy	Responsible Person/Team
[Insert Risk]	[High/Medium/Low]	[Insert Mitigation Plan]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]

7. Create a sustainability plan

How Will You Sustain the Strategy After Initial Implementation?

Sustainability Activity	Target	Responsible Person/Team	Timeline
[Insert Sustainability Activity]	[Insert Target]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Insert Timeline]

Appendix 6- Evaluation plan template

Instructions for use

▪ **SMART objectives:** Clearly define what success looks like for each strategy and ensure the goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

▪ **Feedback methods and data:** Identify how you'll gather feedback and measure progress. This could include surveys, interviews, or tracking participation numbers.

▪ **Check-in points:** Set specific times to review progress and make adjustments as needed.

▪ **Community engagement:** Ensure ongoing engagement with the community to understand how strategies are working.

▪ **Challenges and risks:** Proactively identify any obstacles and how to mitigate them.

▪ **Sustainability:** Develop a plan to keep the efforts going and ensure long-term impact.

1. Decide what success looks like

What are you hoping to achieve with your strategies?

Objective	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-Bound
[Insert Objective]	[Insert Specific Goal]	[Insert How You'll Measure]	[Insert Feasibility]	[Insert Relevance]	[Insert Deadline]

2. Pick the best ways to measure success-

How will you get feedback from the community?

Engagement Activity	Target Audience	Frequency	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Activity]	[Insert Target Audience]	[Insert Frequency]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

What data will you collect?

Data Type	How to Collect	It's Measured By	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Data Type]	[Insert Collection Method]	[Insert Measurement Criteria]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

3. Collect the data

At what points will you check if things are on track?

Check-In Point	Responsible Person/Team	Deadline	Status
[Insert Check-In Point]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Insert Date]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

Who will you collect feedback from?

Feedback Source	Target Group	Method	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Source]	[Insert Group]	[Insert Method]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

4. Look at the results

What patterns or trends do you notice from the data?

Pattern or Trend	Source of Data	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Pattern or Trend]	[Insert Data Source]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

What surprises or unexpected results came up?

Unexpected Result	Reason/Impact	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Unexpected Result]	[Insert Reason/Impact]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

5. Share what you've learned

How will you share the results with the community?

Sharing Activity	Target Audience	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Sharing Activity]	[Insert Target Audience]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

Getting more feedback: How will you gather more community input on the results?

Feedback Method	Target Group	Frequency	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Feedback Method]	[Insert Target Group]	[Insert Frequency]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

6. Make changes if needed

What changes or improvements do you want to make based on the feedback?

Change/Improvement	Reason for Change	Responsible Person/Team	Status
[Insert Change]	[Insert Reason]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

How will you implement these changes?

Implementation Plan	Responsible Person/Team	Deadline	Status
[Insert Plan]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Insert Date]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]

7. Plan for the future

How will you continue to check and improve strategies moving forward?

Reassessment Activity	Responsible Person/Team	Deadline	Status
[Insert Activity]	[Insert Person/Team Responsible]	[Insert Date]	[Not Started/In Progress/Complete]