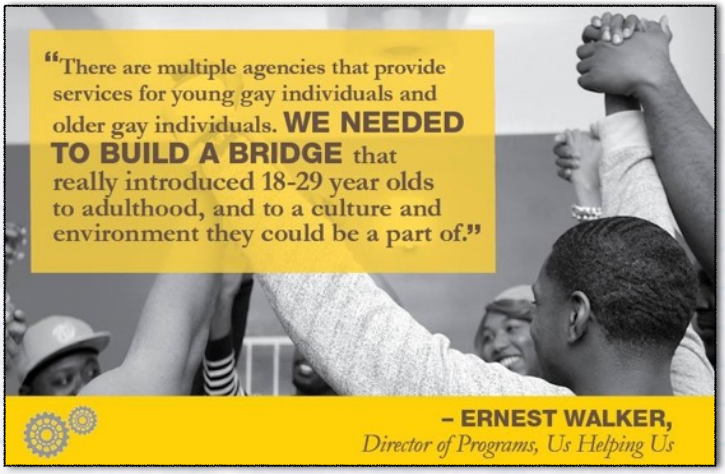
THE MPOWERMENT PROJECT
CORE GROUP BEST PRACTICES

WORKING TOGETHER TO ENHANCE HIGH-IMPACT HIV PREVENTION FOR GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN

For the Mpowerment Project the Core Group (CG) is the decision-making body of the Project that designs and carries out all Project activities. Usually it is comprised of 12 to 20 young adult gay and bisexual men (with fewer CG members in smaller communities, and more in larger, more diverse communities). The Core Group's role is to:

- **Analyze the problems and dilemmas that young gay and bisexual men face in their community.**
- **Strategize how to address those problems through Project activities,**
- **Implement solutions to the problems, and**
- **analyze if the strategies are successful.**

The CG is a key part of the process of diffusing messages and norms about HIV testing, PrEP, and fighting HIV stigma to social networks throughout their own communities.



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Motivations for joining a Core Group

What motivates young men to want to be part of the CG, especially since it takes a considerable amount of time and energy? Keeping their motivations in mind will increase your success in building and maintaining the group.

First, a major motivation to participate in the CG is that it provides an opportunity to meet and socialize with other young men. Since the social aspect of the Project is a prime motivator for many young men (and therefore is a guiding principle), it is important from the outset to include time for socializing and team building among Core Group members. For example, sometimes Core Group members choose to go out dancing together on a Saturday night. Some Core Groups have made it a regular practice of going out to a cafe together following their meetings. Building such opportunities into the Project helps to keep young men involved.

Second, granting decision-making power to the Core Group members is very motivating. This contributes to the strong sense of ownership Core Group members feel for the program,

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which translates into a willingness to commit their time to Project activities. It can be far more rewarding to work on a program when participants have a strong voice in it than if they are only carrying out someone else's decisions, or if they only have very limited power in deciding what the program will do. Again, this sort of empowerment is one of the Guiding Principles of the program.

Third, having an opportunity to help their community is highly motivating for some men, and the Project goals of community-building and HIV prevention offer multiple opportunities to become involved in these areas.

Influential young men are extremely helpful to have as Core Group members.

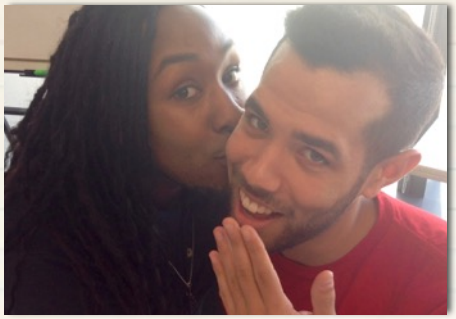
Core Group members get to plan and carry out activities to prevent HIV infection among their peers, support friends to get tested for HIV, and support friends to follow up with medical care if they have HIV. For other men, helping their community by reducing the sense of isolation that many young gay/bisexual men experience is motivating, and thus they welcome the opportunity to actively create new social outlets for young men.

Coordinators are both Core Group members and facilitators of Core Group.

FOOD. It is important to serve food at Core Group meetings because—surprise, surprise!—people like to eat when they get together. The type and amount of food depends on the Project budget, as well as community expectations. Some Projects provide substantial meals before Core Group meetings, while others offer light refreshments (juice, soda, chips, crackers, and cookies). Depending on when Core Group meetings occur, it is important to recognize that Core Group members may be giving up their dinner hour to attend the Core Group, so having something to eat is important.

MORE: The Mpowerment Manual *Module 5 Core Group & Other Volunteers* offers sample CG Agendas, sample Volunteer Interest Sheets and Facilitation Skills-Building Tips. The Mpowerment Manual and *Module 5* is a free download at mpowerment.org.

TOGETHER, CREATING COMMUNITIES FOR HEALTH



Download the Mpowerment Manual at mpowerment.org. It's full of content from projects across the country. It discusses how MP can be used to motivate men to maintain and stay in care.

Mpowerment.org features brief, 10-minute audio slide shows. We have videos specifically for executive directors, funders, and supervisors. Watch them and let us know what you think.

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