Introduction & Acknowledgments

Objectives

To familiarize you with the Mpowerment Project manual and other forms of Mppowerment Project training and support, including information about

1. revising the manual and including examples and pictures from Mpowerment Projects across the country;
2. issues of fidelity and adaptation; and
3. addressing issues that facilitate or impede Mpowerment Project implementation.
faces of mPowerment
Welcome to the new edition of the Mpowerment Project Training Manual. We first printed the manual in 2002, and since then have distributed almost 1,000 copies. That’s a lot of manuals—and demonstrates more interest in the Mpowerment Project than we ever imagined it would receive!

We’re incredibly impressed by the tremendous enthusiasm and energy surrounding HIV prevention for young gay/bisexual men that we’ve observed in communities across the country. Many community-based organizations (CBOs) have been implementing the Mpowerment Project for years, and this new edition reflects much of what we’ve learned from them.

Inside, you’ll find descriptions of a wide range of activities that programs have tried in their communities, along with photos from many of the Mpowerment Projects.
If you’ve read this far, you probably already know that the CDC has been encouraging CBOs to adopt evidence-based, HIV prevention interventions. The Mpowerment Project is an evidence-based model. We first tested it in randomized, controlled trials and demonstrated that the Mpowerment Project was effective in reducing rates of unprotected sex among young gay and bisexual men. Other scientists conducted an independent review of many different approaches to HIV prevention, including HIV counseling and testing, and the Mpowerment Project was found to be the most cost-effective approach to HIV prevention that has been developed (Cohen, Wu, & Farley, 2005).

The Mpowerment Project is one of the interventions identified in the CDC’s Compendium of HIV Prevention Interventions with Evidence of Effectiveness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HIV/AIDS Prevention Research Synthesis Project, 1999). It is also a DEBI intervention (Diffusion of Effective Behavioral Interventions) promoted by the CDC, and it was one of the original Replicating Effective Programs (REP) model interventions (Kegeles et al., 2000). The Mpowerment Project remains a popular intervention for CBOs who want to make a difference in the lives of young gay and bisexual men in their communities. Over 20 years into the epidemic, this is a group that’s still very vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. The reasons why young gay and bisexual men continue to become infected with HIV are complicated, and there is no easy solution to this serious problem (we’ll address these themes throughout the entire manual). Fortunately, the Mpowerment Project offers CBOs an effective HIV prevention model. However, implementing the Mpowerment Project successfully is a challenging endeavor—just ask any of the 125 or more CBOs who have operated a Project.

As the original researchers responsible for developing the Mpowerment Project, the intervention is “in our blood.” We never wanted just to research an intervention and then walk away from it. Instead, it’s been our goal to continue working with CBOs around the country who have been implementing it. We wanted to share with them the successes and difficulties we faced when first developing and testing it in Santa Cruz, CA, Eugene, OR, and Santa Barbara, CA. We learned even more about implementing it when we tested it again in larger, more diverse communities including Albuquerque, NM and Austin, TX. After working with over 70 CBOs, we have become even more enthusiastic about the potential of this model program for not only preventing HIV among young gay and bisexual men, but also creating empowered and dynamic communities of young men across the country.

At the same time, we are well aware of the barriers to successful implementation. Moving any evidence-based intervention from research into the “real world” inevitably requires that communities adapt the model to fit the realities of their situation. After conducting the research to develop and test the Mpowerment Project, we then provided assistance to organizations who called us for help in implementing the Project, even though we had no
After conducting the research to develop and test the Mpowerment Project, we then provided assistance to organizations who called us for help in implementing the Project, even though we had no materials developed yet about how to describe the program. This included helping the communities that took over the research projects after the study funding ended. We began finding out about some of the issues that community-based organizations encountered in implementing the Project. Because we wanted to ensure that the Mpowerment Project is implemented as successfully as possible, we embarked on a study of Projects at 72 CBOs across the U.S. The goals of this study were to discover what conditions and technical assistance tools worked best to support successful implementation of the Mpowerment Project.

**The benefits of a technology exchange system**

After conducting the research that established the effectiveness of the Mpowerment Project, and based on our experiences with helping some organizations implement the Project, we developed a variety of tools to help CBOs implement the Mpowerment Project successfully. To develop these tools, we worked with an advisory group of people from diverse community-based organizations and health departments who
reviewed all of the tools and gave us a great deal of input about how to make them relevant and appropriate to organizations wanting to implement the Mpowerment Project. These tools included the following:

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<td><strong>The Mpowerment Project Manual</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The Mpowerment Project Overview Video</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The M-group Facilitator’s Guide &amp; M-group Meeting Guide</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The Mpowerment Project M-group Video</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mpowerment.org</strong> (a website with a chatroom, an e-mail distribution list, examples of outreach materials, electronic copies of the manual)**</td>
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<td><strong>A three-day interactive training</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Proactive, technical assistance provided at least twice each month by telephone or e-mail.</strong></td>
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As part of our study, we collected feedback from the people working at the CBOs about the tools listed above and we measured how frequently they used each one. We learned a great deal from this feedback. For some agencies, the manual and videos were helpful in understanding how to implement the Mpowerment Project and its Core Elements, key characteristics, and
Guiding Principles. However, other agencies did not find the manual or videos helpful because they had a hard time seeing how the Core Elements and key characteristics of Mpowerment could be adapted to their specific communities.

Many agencies found the manual to be very helpful (several called it “the Bible of the Mpowerment Project”) and used it often, while others thought it was cumbersome and overwhelming. Many people found the three-day trainings enormously valuable, but not everyone had access to them or couldn’t attend one when they needed it the most (e.g., soon after hiring staff).

Feedback also indicated that when trying to illustrate our ideas, we relied too heavily on examples from Albuquerque and Austin, two cities that were part of our earlier research, rather than depicting how the Mpowerment Project was being implemented by CBOs around the country. It was difficult for people to envision successful implementation of the intervention in their community when they saw so little of themselves in the training materials.

In addition, we found that although the manual contains material intended specifically for Project Supervisors and Executive Directors, often they never read it because they believed that the manual was intended to be used primarily by the Project Coordinators.

In addition, we also made site visits to a number of organizations implementing the Mpowerment Project around the country. We interviewed staff at the projects, interviewed participants, and observed activities. We wanted to see how the Project was being adapted for young African American, Latino, and rural men. We visited Projects implemented for younger men, and in large urban environments. We noted “best practices” at these organizations. We also conducted interviews with health department personnel to find out their needs in funding and monitoring the Projects.

Based on this feedback, we have revised our technical assistance tools. We have substantially revised the manual, and it now includes representation of more Mpowerment Projects across the country, with different populations and in different cities, and we have updated the text to include information that we learned about implementation from our most recent research. We are now supplementing the manual with audio slide shows and other web-based tools, some of which have been specifically developed for Project Supervisors and Executive Directors, as well as health department staff. These web-based tools provide a good overview of the Mpowerment Project in an engaging multimedia format, but in no way replace the need for the manual. Our intention is that these new tools will provide another avenue for learning about the Project, and then Project staff and volunteers will refer back to places in the manual where they can learn more.

In addition, we will continue to offer telephone-based and web-based technical assistance delivered by our highly skilled team of specialists, individuals who have had hands-on experience in running the Mpowerment Project with diverse groups of men. We encourage you to talk to us whenever possible!
The Mpowerment Project was designed from the very beginning to be tailored to the unique needs of each community.

Fidelity and adaptation work best

After hearing of the implementation successes and challenges from CBOs across the county, we have concluded that the best way to achieve positive results from the intervention is to adhere to the Project’s “Guiding Principles” and include all of the necessary Core Elements while at the same time adapting them to the special needs of the community (See Module 1: Overview for a full description of Mpowerment Project Core Elements and Guiding Principles). The Project’s Guiding Principles and Core Elements are described in detail throughout this manual, and you’ll also see examples of successful adaptations in each module. Following the Guiding Principles in adapting the intervention is essential, because they provide guidance in how to modify the program in ways that retain the essence of the program.

Those CBOs who have experienced the most success with the Mpowerment Project facilitated an empowering, community-building process among young men in their community. They gave real decision-making authority to the young men in Core Group and found dedicated, skilled, and charismatic community members to work as paid staff, that is, as Project Coordinators. The most successful Projects were both gay-positive and sex-positive, and they sponsored a wide range of fun and engaging Social Outreach activities that attracted men to the Project, particularly men who had not been interested in attending HIV/AIDS prevention activities or organizations. The Projects successfully linked HIV prevention to the fulfillment of the young men’s social needs. The most successful Projects also mobilized young men to support their friends to have safer sex by teaching them in regularly scheduled peer-led groups about how to have supportive conversations regarding HIV prevention.

After attending these small groups and Social Outreach Events, the young men felt motivated and empowered to support each other about safer sex, both with friends they had already had, as well as with new friends. Men also heard more messages from each other about the importance of having safer sex. We observed and heard, again and again, that the CBOs that implemented the Mpowerment Project with fidelity had the most success reaching out to young men in the community and recruiting them to show up at events.

When we talk about “fidelity” we do not mean strict adherence to the exact ways that the intervention was conducted in our research. The Mpowerment Project was designed from the very beginning to be tailored to the unique needs of each community. The types of events that are most successful in Texas or New Jersey might never go over well with young men in California (or vice versa). We were heartened to see that many programs successfully modified the intervention so it was more relevant to their population or setting and fit the unique needs of their community, while still following the philosophy or spirit of the Mpowerment Project that is spelled out in the Guiding Principles. Researchers call these kind of changes to a program “faithful” adaptation (Tenkasi & Mohrman, 1995).

For example, Mpowerment Detroit, a very successful Mpowerment Project targeting African American men who have sex with men (MSM) adapted the Core Group guidelines by creating six-month internships for young men...
interested in joining. They felt that the Project would be more successfully implemented if more structure was provided to the Core Group. The internship concept was their way of achieving a very committed group by adding status and responsibility to the position of Core Group members.

Each intern was assigned a mentor from the already established Core Group. The interns were then given a checklist of required activities to conduct before “graduating” to full core group status. While an internship process may seem like a major deviation from the original Core Group design, which was open to all, in fact the changes were grounded in the Guiding Principles (for more information about the Guiding Principles of the Mpowerment Project, see Module 1: Overview). Here is how:

grounded in Guiding Principles

- The Empowerment Guiding Principle was adhered to because the Core Group members themselves decided on this change and continued to run the Core Group themselves, and even the interns had a strong voice in the group’s decision-making process.

- The Social Focus Guiding Principle was adhered to because the group worked hard to create an atmosphere of togetherness and family. They even chose to adopt the name, “Young Brothers United,” and they worked hard to make their meetings fun as well as productive.

- The power of Peer Influence Guiding Principle was adhered to since established Core Group members worked as mentors to interns, while continuing to spread the message about HIV prevention to their friends.

- And, in a major indicator of the Project’s success, the Community-Building Guiding Principle was adhered to as numerous, carefully designed events were planned and executed, complete with safer sex messaging throughout.

In another example of thoughtful adaptation that follows the Guiding Principles, a number of Projects adopted a “scoreboard” as a way to address the importance of young men encouraging each other to have safer sex. This served as a visual representation of how much informal outreach was being conducted in the community and a reminder to keep having these conversations. Whenever a group member talked to a friend about safer sex, he would make a check on the board for each person he spoke to.

A third example of faithful adaptation concerns decisions some Projects made regarding the hiring of Project Coordinators. In the original Mpowerment model, we always hired young men from the community to be Project Coordinators because we believed that this decision capitalized on the Peer Influence Guiding Principle. However, some CBOs either
If the Coordinator isn’t right for the position, the Project will not succeed.

were not comfortable turning the Project entirely over to young men or couldn’t find young men to hire with sufficient maturity to run the Project themselves. Therefore, these Projects hired a Team Leader who was generally 5-10 years over the Project’s age range and was given some Coordinator responsibilities, but who also served as a role model, mentor, and Supervisor to the other Coordinators. These Projects then hired younger men into the remaining Coordinator positions. By doing so, they still recognized the importance of Peer Influence, while also acknowledging that communities only develop into strong and healthy ones if they have talented and experienced leaders. So, when these Projects hired a Team Leader outside the recommended age range of the Project, they were also helping to ensure its future success by making a concerted effort to help the younger Coordinators develop into future community leaders.

Issues that facilitate or impede Project Implementation

During our research we also gained an understanding of those practices that foster or impede successful Project implementation. Below we discuss briefly a few examples of the most common issues that we observed. We hope that our new and improved three-day interactive training, revised Project manual, and video materials address these and other issues that have sometimes prevented effective Project implementation. By being aware of these issues, CBOs will be better prepared to deal with them if they arise during the implementation process.

Securing adequate resources

Two of the most telling predictors of implementation success are financial and human resources. Poorly funded Projects are bound to have more difficulties implementing a community-level intervention with multiple components than are well-funded Projects. While we did see examples of poorly funded Projects that did an excellent job of implementing the intervention, conversely we also saw some well-funded Projects that never achieved much success. So while money is a critical issue, adequate funding is not sufficient, in itself, to predict implementation success.

Hiring the right staff

We found that the individuals hired as Coordinators are the most important predictors of programmatic success. Even if a Project has unlimited financial resources, if the Coordinator isn’t the right fit for the position, the Project will never succeed. Agencies that made hasty hiring decisions about their Coordinators often ended up regretting the decisions. It is critically important that organizations take their time to find Coordinators who possess the qualities most likely to help the Project succeed.

Holding program staff accountable

We found that when the right staff were on board and conscientiously implemented the various Project components, the intervention was more successful. But when staff, for whatever reason, failed to follow through on their work, and when Project
Supervisors or funders did not hold them accountable for their activities, then not surprisingly the intervention was unsuccessful. Even the best and most dedicated Coordinators need support to do their jobs well. Most of the Coordinators we talked to expressed a real desire for constructive criticism from their Project Supervisors. They wanted to know that their agencies were paying attention to their work; without it they felt devalued, and often ended up demoralized and burnt out.

Careful supervision is critical for the Project to succeed. When we first started the Mpowerment Project, some of us on staff felt that a more “hands-off” approach to supervision would likely be the best fit for the program, because it would let the Coordinators act autonomously and would help them feel empowered. We were very surprised to observe that the hands-off approach didn’t work very well, and that Project Supervisors who took a more “hands-on” approach usually had the best success. (Of course by “hands-on” we don’t mean micro-managing Coordinators, or squashing their creativity and killing their spirit.)

Understanding the model thoroughly

We have learned that people need ample help in order to fully understand the Core Elements and Guiding Principles of the Mpowerment Project, and that simply attending a single training is not sufficient. However, people who read the manual and then return to it whenever questions arise acquire a much deeper understanding of the intervention and implement it more successfully. The Mpowerment Project really is different from most other approaches to HIV prevention, and it takes some amount of effort to become fully versed in the program’s nuances. For example, some agencies really understand the importance of running a Project with a social focus. They do a great job of planning and throwing large, community-wide events that are a lot of fun and attract a wide range of participants. But, these Projects sometimes lose sight of the need to incorporate strong and appealing HIV prevention messages into the events. So in essence they are great party planners, but not so great at HIV prevention.

Sometimes implementing the Mpowerment Project is really like a juggling act—keeping lots of balls in the air at once. If Project staff aren’t intimately familiar with the Project’s Core Elements and Guiding Principles, it’s really easy to drop a ball and not notice because their attention is focused elsewhere. We’ve seen Projects that spend so much time and effort organizing Core Groups and Social Outreach Events that they “forget” that they haven’t run peer-led M-groups in over eight months! (See Module 9: M-groups for more information.) A comprehensive understanding of the intervention really helps increase the odds of implementing it successfully.

Believing in the intervention’s ability to affect young men’s behavior

We found that belief in the model and its Guiding Principles is key. Organizations most successfully implement the Project when they believe that the intervention is likely to be effective with their own populations (even if it requires some appropriate adaptation). We’ve heard lots of stories of
CBOs voicing the opinion that “my community won’t like this,” or “this will never work here,” only to find that the exact opposite is true once they give the intervention a try. When Coordinators or Project Supervisors don’t believe in the model, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and community members will sense their skepticism. No one wants to come to a Core Group or attend a Formal Outreach event if the people hosting it aren’t invested in the model. Conversely, if Coordinators and Project Supervisors are true champions of the program, their enthusiasm rubs off on the community, making implementation success much more likely.

Being committed to innovation

There must be a desire to change the existing approaches to HIV prevention in order to create space for the Project’s necessary Core Elements. If organizations are not committed to changing their approach to HIV prevention, and are reluctant to adopt some new approaches, they are unlikely to implement the Mpowerment Project successfully. Sometimes organizations feel as if the only way they can get funding for their programs is to pick a science-based intervention and say they’ll implement it. So they may pick the Mpowerment Project model because it appears to most closely resemble their current programming. By failing to investigate how it varies from their current practice, however, this often results in their failing to implement the Core Elements of the Mpowerment Project as intended, and so such Projects rarely experience much success. These interventions really are Mpowerment Projects in name only.

Allowing adequate time for planning

It is extremely important for CBOs to set aside sufficient time to become familiar with the Project’s intervention model and then develop a careful implementation plan, instead of hastily trying to implement the Project. It can take substantial planning, for example, to consider how to handle the issue of dedicated space for the Project, and if a separate space is impossible, how to find a suitable alternative.

Sometimes the Mpowerment Project is the first openly gay project an agency has hosted. For such agencies, it’s critical that they anticipate what that may mean in terms of their image in the community, and of their staff, who may be unaccustomed to working with young gay/bisexual men. Agencies that are used to operating in a hierarchical manner may have difficulty adjusting to a program that requires that important decisions be made by program participants themselves. Some agencies may be used to having their staff work in their offices from 8-5 or 9-6 every day. These agencies will need to schedule more flexible hours for Project staff, who will often need to work some evening hours. In addition, agencies may also need to make arrangements to house Mpowerment Project staff in a community space away from the parent organization. These are only a few of the types of planning issues that must be considered when taking on an intervention like the Mpowerment Project. While no CBO can anticipate every issue that may arise, our technical assistance team can help your agency identify key issues that are likely to need some advance planning and preparation.
the course of our research with the 72 participating organizations in our study, we were deeply impressed by the creative thinking, commitment, passion, and energy that CBOs have invested in implementing the Mpowerment Project. We feel very lucky to have been able to collaborate with such a talented and hard working group of people, all of whom are working to reduce the spread of HIV among MSM.

At the same time, we are excited about the prospect of continuing to work with many of these organizations, as well as with new ones. We honor and celebrate the tremendous diversity that exists within the communities of young gay/bisexual men, and are gratified that the Mpowerment Project seems to be adaptable and thus able to meet the needs of young gay/bisexual from very diverse backgrounds. Together we can make a difference and learn, grow, and change as the epidemic changes. But only through continued dialogue can this happen, so we wholeheartedly ask you to continue to give us your honest feedback at all times.

Best Regards,

Susan Kegeles, Greg Rebchook, John Hamiga, David Sweeney, Scott Tebbetts, Robert Williams, Ben Zovod


Acknowledgments

Dr. Susan Kegeles and Dr. Robert Hays, both research psychologists at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS), at the University of California, San Francisco, conducted the original research that developed and tested the Mpowerment Project. At the outset, Dr. Kegeles had been interested in developing an HIV prevention intervention that involved mobilizing entire communities for change, thereby not requiring individuals to seek help for changing their sexual risk behavior. Instead, she wanted to develop an HIV prevention approach that changed the social environment of people at risk for HIV/AIDS, as well as focused on individual- and interpersonal-level issues that result in people being vulnerable to HIV.
Dr. Hays was committed to conducting HIV prevention research on gay/bisexual men’s issues, and noted that while young gay/bisexual men were contracting HIV, no research was specifically focusing on them. He and Dr. Kegeles wrote the first scientific paper showing that young gay/bisexual men were at high risk for HIV. Dr. Hays was dedicated to helping young gay/bisexual men avoid contracting HIV, as he and nearly all of his friends had as young men. Together, Drs. Kegeles and Hays conducted the first research trial of the Mpowerment Project in Santa Cruz, CA, Eugene, OR, and Santa Barbara, CA. After finding that the Mpowerment Project successfully reduced young gay/bisexual men’s sexual risk behavior, they then decided to conduct a second trial of the intervention in larger, more diverse communities, and began the study in Albuquerque, NM, Austin, TX, and Phoenix, AZ.

Meantime, community-based organizations began to express considerable interest in implementing the Mpowerment Project. So Drs. Kegeles and Hays began developing materials to help organizations conduct the intervention, and started moving the research into practice at organizations conducting HIV/AIDS prevention. Realizing that they needed the expertise of someone with real-world HIV/AIDS experience, they brought psychologist Dr. Greg Rebchook onto their team. Dr. Rebchook had worked as a front-line staff member conducting HIV prevention for gay/bisexual men, as well as for youth and injection drug users, in both health departments and community-based organizations.

Dr. Hays died of AIDS in 2001, and Drs. Kegeles and Rebchook have continued this work ever since. Their focus has continued to be on conducting HIV/AIDS prevention research that makes a difference to those most at-risk. It is their fervent hope that the body of research which they and Dr. Hays have conducted has a lasting impact on young gay/bisexual men’s lives both here in the U.S. and around the world.

A project of this size and scope would not be possible without the tremendous commitment and efforts of many individuals and organizations. Dr. Kegeles and Dr. Rebchook thank everyone involved with the Mpowerment Project for sharing their experience, wisdom, insights, talents, skills, and resources. In particular, they want to formally express their gratitude to the following people.

We particularly want to acknowledge and thank the Mpowerment Project staff at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, University of California, San Francisco, who have provided so much time, effort, and thought to this project. They have been extraordinary: Ben Zovod, John Hamiga, Scott Tebbetts, David Sweeney, Robert Williams, Alberto Curotto, Brady Ralston, and Larry Osborn.
We want to recognize the contributions of the young gay/bisexual men who worked as Project Coordinators.

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The Mpowerment Project (Eugene, OR): James Fisher, Jeffrey Pounds, Steven Shuchat, and William White

Pride Mission (Santa Barbara, CA): Jon Cortez, Sandy Fox, Scott Moore, and Matt Mutchler

MPower (Albuquerque, NM): John Hamiga, Christopher Norton, Aaron Olson, Abraham Placencio, and Steven Romero

Austin Men’s Project (Austin, TX): Jesse Carter, Luis Lopez, David Sweeney, and Brian Toynes
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- Replicating Effective Programs (REP) Community Partners
- AIDS Resources, Information & Services (ARIS) of Santa Clara County; San Jose, CA (ARIS was also our UARP Community Collaborator)
- AIDS Project East Bay; Oakland, CA
- Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center; San Francisco, CA
- Center for Human Development; Pleasant Hill, CA
- Contra Costa Health Services, AIDS Program; Martinez, CA
- Marin AIDS Project; San Rafael, CA
- Proyecto Contra SIDA Por Vida, San Francisco, CA
- San Mateo County AIDS Program; San Mateo, CA
- Stop AIDS Project; San Francisco, CA
Translation into Practice and into African American Community-Based Organization Partners

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### Photo Credits

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Together creating community for friendship for health for life

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Overview

Objectives

To familiarize you with the Mpowerment Project, and in particular:

1. the Mpowerment Project’s history;
2. why HIV prevention with young gay/bisexual men remains critically important;
3. the Mpowerment Project’s theoretical basis, including its Guiding Principles;
4. its Core Elements;
5. the scientific evidence of its effectiveness and its cost effectiveness; and
6. the steps to starting the Project in a community.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module:

Figure 1.1 Guiding Principles Quick Reference Guide
Overview of the Mpowerment Project

Young gay/bisexual men—those between the ages of 18 and 29 — continue to engage in high rates of unprotected anal intercourse and are becoming infected with HIV at high rates. HIV Prevention Planning Councils across the country consistently identify young gay/bisexual men as one of the highest priority groups for HIV prevention efforts—both young men of color as well as young white men.

The Mpowerment Project is a model HIV prevention program that has been designed specifically to address the needs of young gay/bisexual men. Scientific studies demonstrate that the program reduces the rates of unprotected anal intercourse among this group. The scientific articles demonstrating the effectiveness of the Mpowerment Project can be found at the end of this manual or on our website (mpowerment.org) as PDF downloads.
There is a grave public misperception that the gay community has been saturated with AIDS prevention services. Sometimes, when the newest epidemiological data comes out and shows that young gay/bisexual men are still engaging in risky behavior and contracting HIV, headlines proclaim: “HIV Prevention Efforts Not Working!” These myths ignore the fact that, each year, new young men “come out” as gay or bisexual, and most have not been exposed to the prevention campaigns of previous years, nor have they been reached by current HIV prevention efforts.

HIV prevention for young gay/bisexual men must be ongoing, funded adequately, and dynamic—ever changing, in order to keep young men’s attention. Furthermore, we know that men who report having had unprotected sex are more likely to have unprotected sex again. For this reason, hearing an HIV prevention message just once isn’t sufficient. To have the greatest impact, HIV prevention programs must intervene at an early point in young men’s sexual initiation and continue to reinforce safer sex over time.

Since scientific studies show that the Mpowerment Project reduces rates of unprotected sex among young gay/bisexual men, it is listed in the CDC’s Compendium of HIV Prevention Interventions with Evidence of Effectiveness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HIV/AIDS Prevention Research Synthesis Project, 1999). The Mpowerment Project targets the entire young gay/bisexual (MSM) male community, and it also addresses individual, interpersonal, social, and structural/environmental issues, some of which are described later in this module. The Project can also be used to support HIV testing and to encourage HIV-positive men to obtain health care and treatment. HIV-positive men who are on treatment are less likely to transmit HIV to others than are untreated HIV-positive men.

It has recently been recognized that HIV prevention interventions aimed at men who have sex with men (MSM) are less effective when they only focus on one area that impacts behavior. So, for example, if an intervention only focuses on changing men’s attitudes about safer sex or their recognition of sexual risk (i.e., issues that pertain to the individual person’s thought processes) but ignores interpersonal issues, social support, and altering the social environment, then the intervention will not be as effective. Adding to the intervention a biomedical aspect—that is, helping to get HIV-positive men into treatment—provides additional strength to HIV prevention efforts. The Mpowerment Project is sometimes referred to as a “combination HIV prevention program” because it addresses all of these aspects.
Many young gay/bisexual men have unprotected sex

In 1990 we conducted one of the first surveys about the sexual risk-taking behavior of young gay/bisexual men and found that 43% of the young men (ages 18-29) from three medium-sized West Coast communities reported unprotected anal sex during the past six months (*Hays, Kegeles, & Coates, 1990*). This study was followed by numerous other investigations of young gay/bisexual men, each with similar results. For example, a survey of thousands of young MSM (ages 15-22) in 7 communities (Baltimore, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Seattle, and the San Francisco Bay Area) found that 41% reported unprotected anal sex during the past six months (*Valleroy et al., 2000*). More recently, the National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) System, which surveyed men in 17 urban areas in 2003-2005, found that 53% of young men (ages 18-24) had unprotected anal sex with a boyfriend, and 35% had unprotected anal sex with a casual sex partner (*CDC, 2006*).

Young gay/bisexual men are continuing to contract HIV

Young gay/bisexual men have consistently been at high risk for HIV infection since the epidemic began, and this continues to the present time. From 2001 through 2006, male-to-male sex was the largest transmission category in the U.S., and of all age groups, HIV/AIDS cases increased most among young MSM aged 13-24 (*CDC, 2008*). In 2006 the CDC created an HIV incidence surveillance system in selected areas of the United States as a component of its national HIV/AIDS reporting system. The purpose of the system is to estimate the number of new HIV infections occurring each year in the United States. The results indicate that in 2006, of new HIV infections among males, 72% were in MSM. Men aged 13-29 accounted for 38% of the new infections among all MSM (*CDC, 2006*).

Another CDC study examined the prevalence of HIV among young men (i.e., the proportion of men with HIV at any one time, rather than just new infections) in six cities (Baltimore, MD; Dallas, TX; Los Angeles, CA; Miami, FL; New York, NY; and Seattle, WA.). This study found that 14% of MSM aged 18-24 and 18% of MSM aged 25-29 were infected with HIV (*MacKellar et al., 2005*). Alarming, this study also found that most of the young men who were HIV-positive did not know it—79% of the men aged 18-24 and 70% of the men aged 25-29—even though most had been tested within the past year.

One investigation compiled epidemiological data from a variety of studies that were conducted around the U.S. to estimate the HIV incidence rates among MSM (*Stall et al, 2009*). The authors estimated that on average, 4.7% of young MSM are infected with HIV by the age of 20, and thereafter, another 2.4% get infected yearly. This means that by the age of 30, more than 25% of men have HIV—truly an unacceptable level.
There are substantial disparities in the HIV epidemic among young men from different ethnic/racial groups. Of all young MSM, young Black men bear the greatest burden. More than twice as many Black MSM aged 13–24 were diagnosed with HIV infection or AIDS in 2006 as their white or Hispanic counterparts (CDC, 2008). The study that compiled data from a number of different investigations estimates that 7.8% of young Black MSM are infected with HIV by the age of 20, and that each year another 4% become infected. By the time they reach the age of 30, an estimated 39% have HIV. Latino men’s rates of HIV infection fall in between white and Black men.

A variety of factors contribute to sexual risk behavior among young gay/bisexual men

One might ask, “Why are young gay men engaging in sexual behaviors that put them at risk for HIV? Can’t you just tell them about HIV, and that’s enough?”

It is important to recognize that there are many different reasons why young men engage in risky behaviors, well beyond simply knowing what HIV is or what is considered risky. These reasons can exist within the young men themselves. Such reasons can include their attitudes about the enjoyment of safer sex or their beliefs that other young gay men are unlikely to be HIV-positive.
The reasons can be due to interpersonal issues, such as challenges in negotiating safer sex in different types of sexual relationships. They can also be due to social issues such as lack of support for having safer sex, or social norms or expectations among young gay/bisexual men that do not support safer sex. Structural issues can also result in increased sexual risk, such as the use of the Internet as a way to meet men, or having few or no venues in which to meet each other that are not sex-charged (e.g., bars or cruising places).

Some of these are described below, but by no means is this an exhaustive list. If an HIV prevention program is to be effective with young men, it should attempt to target a wide range of factors that influence a young man’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Not only do men engage in risky behavior for different reasons, but the reasons can change over time for each man.

**Individual factors**

For the most part, young men who engage in unprotected anal sex do not lack knowledge about HIV, and they recognize that their behavior puts them at risk for HIV transmission (although they are often unclear that unprotected sex with boyfriends can be quite risky). Because medical treatments now keep people with HIV alive and well and make it possible for them to lead relatively normal lives for a long time, HIV/AIDS is no longer discussed much in public or in the media. In addition, HIV-positive men can take HIV treatments without others knowing. This “HIV silence” can lull young men into thinking that AIDS is no longer much of an issue, since they may be unaware that friends and sex partners are HIV-positive. Thus, young men who have contracted HIV may feel quite reluctant to discuss it with others or to disclose it in sexual situations, out of a fear of being rejected.

The heightened feelings of invulnerability that many young men feel about a variety of risky behaviors (that it “won’t happen to me”)—coupled with the HIV silence—contribute to an attitude among many young men that it is safe to have unprotected sex with other young men. In addition, young men have heard about AIDS since they were born, so it’s nothing new to them, which makes it easier for them to become complacent. Not knowing people with AIDS, or only knowing people who are HIV-positive and are doing well on treatments, may lead them to conclude that having HIV is “no big deal.”

Consequently, young gay/bisexual men tend not to seek out HIV prevention services. Community organizations consistently report that very few young men...
attend their HIV prevention activities, such as safer sex workshops or groups focusing on prevention with those who are HIV-positive. Any approach to HIV prevention needs to overcome this major barrier. Finally, another major barrier to risk reduction are attitudes that safer sex is boring and not very enjoyable. Young men are often exploring their sexuality, which may lead to a willingness to try a variety of sexual activities—both high and low risk—with multiple partners. Due to inexperience, young men may be less skilled at making safer sex hot and enjoyable.

**Young gay/bisexual men engage in risky sexual behavior for a variety of reasons**

**Interpersonal factors** Young gay/bisexual men often have little or no experience talking to their partners about safer sex and may be reluctant to insist on using condoms every time. Many young men are reluctant to discuss HIV with potential sex partners, uncertain about how another man will react to such a discussion. This silence can result in young men making inaccurate assumptions about each other’s HIV status rather than actually discussing it. Coming out as gay/bisexual can be a period of emotional turbulence for young men. During this process, many may experience low self-esteem and depression, in part due to homophobic responses from others. As a consequence, they may be less motivated to engage in safer sex and less confident about their ability to communicate to partners their desire for safer sex.
Further, protecting one’s health is not necessarily the main concern of young gay/bisexual men. Interpersonal motivations may be more pressing—wanting to fit in, to find companionship and intimacy—and these may contribute to unsafe sex. Additionally, our research and many other studies have shown that unprotected sex is most likely to occur with a boyfriend—someone whose affection is very important to a young gay/bisexual man. Wanting to ensure that a boyfriend loves him may make it particularly challenging to negotiate safer sex within that relationship. Yet research is now showing that over 50% of HIV transmission among gay/bisexual men occurs within boyfriend relationships. Finally, HIV-positive men may fear being stigmatized and rejected by others and therefore are reluctant to disclose their HIV-status. Because of the HIV silence discussed earlier, young men who are HIV-positive can feel quite isolated and unable to negotiate safer sex without being “outed” about their serostatus.

**Cultural factors** Young gay/bisexual men of color—many of whom may not feel comfortable identifying as gay or bisexual—may face additional pressures that decrease their ability to consistently have safer sex (though rates of unprotected sex usually don’t vary by race or ethnicity). Many feel isolated due to conflicts they experience between their sexual orientation and their cultural norms (e.g., feeling pressure that they should father children to be “real men”). These young men may feel alienated from their birth culture, yet may also have difficulty feeling at home in the larger, mainstream gay community because they perceive and experience it as primarily white and its members as rejecting men of color.

Men from cultures that put great emphasis on masculinity may feel poorly about themselves for not being very masculine, and so may have difficulties negotiating safer sex when having sex with a man they perceive as being more masculine. Some men of color may have internalized so many negative messages about homosexuality that they feel unable to negotiate safer sex. Men who have been raised hearing many negative messages about homosexuality in their church or family may feel so poorly about themselves that they fail to care for themselves sexually or to seek HIV testing. Of enormous importance, young men of color may feel reluctant to seek HIV testing out of concern that they will be treated poorly by HIV testing staff who are white. They may also be wary of testing at clinics in their own community because they may run into someone who knows them or their family and will tells others they saw them there. Importantly, many men of color across the U.S. lack prevention programs that adequately address their specific needs, and do not take into account the impact of cultural issues on their sexual risk behavior or willingness to get tested for HIV.
Community/structural factors

The norms within the young gay subculture’s social scene also may not be conducive to safer sex. There may be an emphasis on getting high on alcohol or drugs, and on “hooking up,” with little concern or support for sexual risk reduction. In many communities, gay bars and public cruising settings provide the main opportunities for young gay/bisexual men to meet and socialize. Both are sex-charged environments, and the bar scene’s emphasis on alcohol sets the stage for engaging in sex while high—a behavior that consistently has been found to contribute to unsafe sex. Many young gay/bisexual men meet sexual partners through the Internet, through “dating” or “party” phone lines, or through applications on their phones (e.g., Grindr, Loopt) which offer little, if any, HIV prevention information.

In addition, men meeting online may reach incorrect conclusions about each others’ HIV status. Men may not have accurate or up-to-date information about their HIV status in their profiles. A man’s profile might say “HIV negative,” but he might not know that he recently got infected with HIV. According to the CDC’s 2009 fact sheet on young MSM, “In one recent study, 77% of young, urban MSM aged 15–29 who tested HIV-positive as part of the study mistakenly believed they were not infected. The percentage was even higher for young Black HIV-infected MSM, 90% of whom did not know their infection status.” (CDC, 2009).

Additionally, people who are acutely infected with HIV (i.e., before their bodies have had the chance to produce HIV antibodies) have very high levels of HIV in their blood and semen, making unprotected sex with them very likely to transmit HIV to their partners.
In addition, many men might be personally committed to being safe sexually but find no social environment that supports them in their desire to be safe. Many men may want to meet other young men for companionship, to have fun, and just to be themselves—but no such venues exist. Their social environments, as described above, may be supportive of risk-taking, whether the social environment is a bar, club, or the Internet. Some young bisexual men may socialize almost entirely with heterosexual friends and so rarely encounter HIV prevention information that is relevant to their experiences. Young gay/bisexual men need a social environment where they are supported in their attempts to have safer sex; where they are supported about being who they are; where they can hear messages that are both gay and sex positive; and where they are encouraged to analyze their world views, values, and assumptions about their lives. They need a safe space where they can analyze what they are doing sexually and how they are responding to the messages they receive from their families and communities regarding being young gay/bisexual men.

**Biomedical factors**

Of course, the reason that a young gay/bisexual man who doesn’t inject drugs gets infected with HIV is because he has sex with someone else who does have HIV. The attention in this project must be on both HIV-positive and HIV-negative young men. There is accumulating scientific evidence that HIV-positive people with low viral loads are less infectious than people with high viral loads; however, it may still be possible for someone with a low or undetectable viral load to transmit HIV. In addition, when someone is first infected with HIV, they can be quite infectious. Research has also been showing that after people find out that they are HIV-positive, about two-thirds of them reduce their sexual risk behavior. HIV medical treatments are keeping people alive, well functioning, relatively healthy, and the medications are getting easier to take. For all of these reasons, it is important to encourage young men to get tested regularly, and to work with a healthcare provider if they find out that they have HIV.

Since many different factors contribute to sexual risk taking among young gay/bisexual men, a “multi-level” HIV prevention program is needed that addresses a range of issues.
A brief history of the Mpowerment Project

Recognizing the critical need for HIV prevention programs for young gay/bisexual men, Dr. Susan Kegeles and Dr. Robert Hays, research psychologists at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS) at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), applied for funding to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to design, implement, and evaluate a community-level HIV prevention program for young gay/bisexual men. Their five-year grant was awarded in 1990. They developed their initial ideas for the program by drawing from the findings of their surveys of young gay/bisexual men; from a series of focus groups with young gay/bisexual men; and from the research literature in social, developmental, and community psychology. They pilot tested the program in Santa Cruz, CA. Based on encouraging results there, they refined the program and implemented it in a second community, Eugene, OR, where the young men running the Program named it the Mpowerment Project. Following the program’s success in Eugene, it was replicated in Santa Barbara, CA. In 1995, Drs. Kegeles and Hays received a second five-year grant from the NIMH to further develop the program for use in major metropolitan areas across the U.S. Dr. Greg Rebchook, a research psychologist who had worked at a department of public health and at a community-based organization, joined the team in 1996. This new grant enabled them to implement the Mpowerment Project in Albuquerque, NM in 1997-1998 and in Austin, TX in 1999-2000.
As Drs. Kegeles, Hays, and Rebchook began work on getting the Mpowerment Project adopted by community-based organizations (CBOs) around the U.S., they began being contacted by organizations requesting help in implementing it. The researchers realized that they needed to develop a more systematic way to help CBOs than simply by taking telephone calls from agencies. They joined an effort that the CDC had begun to develop manuals and materials for CBOs to help them implement specific intervention programs. The Mpowerment Project was identified as one of the initial “DEBI” (Diffusing Effective Behavioral Interventions) projects that the CDC promoted as effective approaches to reduce HIV infection. Because an increasing number of organizations chose to focus on helping young gay/bisexual men reduce their risk for HIV, they began contacting the UCSF researchers for help.

As a consequence, from 2002 to 2007 the researchers focused their efforts on helping agencies implement the program effectively. Drs. Kegeles and Rebchook’s grant was called Translating Research into Practice (TRIP-1) and was funded by the NIMH. To help CBOs implement the Mpowerment Project, they developed and launched the Mpowerment Project Technical Exchange System (MPTES). It included a detailed training manual, an M-group facilitation video, a three-day training for Project Coordinators and sponsoring agency staff, proactive Technical Assistance (TA) so Project Coordinators could receive ongoing advice and support via telephone contact, and a website that provided additional resources and a listserv (Rebchook, Kegeles, Huebner, & Trip Research Team, 2006). The term “exchange” was used as part of the name for MPTES, out of a recognition that the learning involved in implementing the Mpowerment Project would be a mutual learning process for the Mpowerment Project team and the CBOs.

David Sweeney and John Hamiga, who were former Coordinators of the Mpowerment research Projects from Austin TX and Albuquerque NM, and who had then worked at CBOs implementing the Projects in each locale after the research phase ended, joined the researchers in California to help CBOs implement the Project. They helped to develop the MPTES, provided the technical assistance (TA) and conducted trainings around the country. TRIP-1 involved working with and learning from 72 agencies across the United States, from Alaska and Hawaii to Florida and Puerto Rico. Scott Tebbetts conducted over 500 interviews with staff and participants of the Projects. The team discovered a variety of factors that either facilitated or hampered effective implementation of the Project, as well as ways to better assist agencies implementing the program. At the time of this writing, the researchers are now focused on TRIP-2, another research project funded by NIMH, in which they are taking all that they learned in the previous research and applying it to developing an improved MPTES, and working with 80 more CBOs around the U.S. Lessons learned in TRIP-1 about the real world of HIV prevention efforts have been incorporated into this revised manual.
The Mpowerment Project’s Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles from theories of behavior change and from interviews with young gay/bisexual men and service providers serve as the foundation for this HIV prevention program. The Guiding Principles are described below, and are used to guide all Core Elements (components) of the Mpowerment Project. Scientific articles that describe the program’s underlying theories can be found at the end of this manual and on our website at mpowerment.org.

The Guiding Principles inform all aspects of the Mpowerment Project. For various reasons, however, it is often necessary to adapt the Mpowerment Project. Sometimes it needs to be adapted in order to be effective with a population other than that for which the original intervention was designed, such as a different ethnic/racial group or for younger or older men, or because the sponsoring agency has less than optimal funding for it. Understanding the Guiding Principles helps agencies figure out how to adapt the intervention while retaining fidelity to the original model. Agencies that are proactive in anticipating how implementing the intervention might work within their organization and their community will have a better experience running their Project.

The Guiding Principles are key to the Mpowerment Project model, and guide all aspects of its implementation. They also help Projects adapt the Project in order to respond to unique aspects of their target population and to differing levels of funding for the program.

Young men are very concerned with social and self-esteem issues

HIV prevention is not in itself particularly motivating or captivating for young gay/bisexual men. Agencies that try to reach young gay/bisexual men often report that it is very difficult to attract the men to their activities. HIV prevention efforts at an agency cannot be effectively implemented if young men won’t attend. For example, it can be difficult to implement multi-session groups on HIV prevention. Most young men do not seek out help to change their sexual behaviors that put them at risk for HIV. It is important to recognize that HIV/AIDS is only one threat among many that young gay/bisexual men confront in a homophobic society where gay-bashing, discrimination, and battles over gay rights are commonplace. Young gay/bisexual men may be dealing simultaneously with issues of self-esteem, alienation, isolation, cultural/social identity, racism (in the gay community and in society in general), family problems, and financial, education, and employment pressures.
Therefore, the first Guiding Principle is that a successful HIV prevention intervention for young gay/bisexual men needs to tie HIV risk-reduction to the satisfaction of other needs, such as developing friendships, having fun, and enhancing self-esteem. Through focus groups, it became clear that social concerns—such as how to meet and have fun with other young gay/bisexual men—are highly motivating. Thus, a social focus became the central theme of the Project. Using appealing, fun, engaging social activities and incorporating HIV prevention into them is a way of ensuring that men will attend and hear about sexual risk reduction and the importance of HIV testing.

**Peer influences are strong among young gay/bisexual Men**

The second key issue guiding the development of the Mpowerment Project is the recognition that peer influence plays a major role in the lives of young gay/bisexual men. Numerous studies have shown that—regarding almost any type of behavior, whether it is smoking, drugs, fashion, political attitudes, or others—one’s peers are the most credible sources of information, and peer pressure is one of the most highly effective forms of influence. Therefore, the **second Guiding Principle is that for the Mpowerment Project to be effective in reaching young gay/bisexual men, it needs to be peer-based and use peer influence.**

**Building healthy community among young gay/bisexual men**

Many young gay/bisexual men are frustrated with their local gay communities because there are few places to go to meet other young men and where they can safely be themselves. Young men often only have a few other gay male friends, and therefore they can feel lonely and isolated much of the time. Men under drinking age can typically only find each other online or at a few cruising places, and men at or over drinking age can also find each other at gay bars—but these are not health promoting environments.

Young men want to be with each other in a relaxed, comfortable environment where they can be themselves. The Mpowerment Project creates settings where
young men can express their identities with each other, find support, and most importantly, band together to take action on issues of importance to them. They can feel a part of something bigger than themselves: a young gay/bisexual men’s community. Being a part of a young men’s community where men support each other regarding safer sex and getting tested means that each young man in the community experiences support from many others about HIV prevention. Therefore, the third Guiding Principle is that it is essential to build a young gay/bisexual men’s community where men support each other about sexual risk reduction and obtaining HIV testing, where the social norms and expectations support HIV prevention, and where men help each other in coping with the stresses of being gay/bisexual.

Empowerment promotes more lasting changes in behavior

The fourth Guiding Principle is that the Project serves a mobilizing and empowering function within the young gay/bisexual men’s community—young men take ownership of the Project rather than having the Project carried out for them. From research in other areas of behavior change (Rappaport, 1981), it is clear that when individuals are actively involved in finding and implementing solutions to their problems, any changes they make in their behavior are more likely to last. Thus, providing young gay/bisexual men with a mechanism for analyzing issues and problems that they experience and coming up with solutions for these problems, and for designing and running the intervention activities themselves, foster a sense of ownership of the program and a sense of personal commitment to HIV prevention.

The Project focuses on personal empowerment. It helps young men analyze why they are at risk for HIV and why they do not get tested for HIV as frequently as they should. It also helps them consider what actions they can take to be healthier and withstand pressures that cause them to be at risk. In addition, the Project focuses on community empowerment: developing a community of young men that can address some of the stresses and strains that affect them.

Community-wide change occurs through interpersonal networks

The program’s design draws from the theory of diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1995), which states that members of a social system are most likely to adopt new behavioral practices (i.e., safer sex, regular HIV testing) when they see their peers adopting the behavior and communicating that they feel it is desirable and important. Therefore, the fifth Guiding Principle is that community change comes about through a process of informal communication and modeling by peers within their friendship networks. Increased networks are developed through the community-building activities of the Project, but men also take the messages about safer
sex and testing to men who may never attend any of the Project’s activities. The Mpowerment Project facilitates a process for young gay/bisexual men to actively communicate with each other about safer sex and testing, and to encourage each other to practice these two things through these social networks. The goal is for safer sex and regular HIV testing to become the mutually accepted norm within the young gay/bisexual men’s community.

**Fostering pride: gay-positive, ethnic/racial-positive, and sex-positive messages encourage behavior change**

The sixth Guiding Principle of the Mpowerment Project is that the program enriches and strengthens young gay/bisexual men’s pride about who they are, and encourages them to explore and celebrate their sexuality by not just focusing on condom use but by including a wide variety of safer sex behaviors. Materials produced by the Project show positive images of young gay/bisexual men that reflect the diversity of the community. This Guiding Principle—about young gay/bisexual men taking pride in who they are—encompasses pride in one’s ethnic/racial identity as well, particularly if they are young men of color. All activities designed to promote safer sex are fun, uplifting, and sex-positive; fear and shame-inducing approaches are avoided.

**A “multi-level” HIV prevention program is needed to address a variety of issues and factors that contribute to sexual risk taking and reluctance to get regular HIV testing among young gay/bisexual men**

Self-esteem, interpersonal and cultural issues, internalized homophobia, community norms, and many other factors all influence young men’s risk behavior. Since young gay/bisexual men engage in unsafe sex for a variety of reasons, interventions that focus solely on one level of factors will miss men who engage in unsafe sex for other reasons. Not only should the Mpowerment Project focus on encouraging men to reduce their sexual risk behavior, it should also encourage men to get tested for HIV regularly. **Therefore, the seventh and final Guiding Principle is the need for a “multi-level” approach.**

The various components of the Mpowerment Project try to address the variety of contributors to risk behavior and reluctance to test regularly. For example, Social Outreach Events and safer-sex Outreach Team performances and outreach materials change over the course of the intervention so that a wide variety of issues can be targeted.

During our research on the TRIP-1 Project, we observed that while the success of the Project was dependent to a significant degree on the effectiveness of staff, the Implementing Agency and the Project Funder also made major contributions to how well each Project operated.
Implementing agency

Most often a community-based service organization (such as an AIDS organization or a gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender community center) or health department oversees the operation of the Mpowerment Project by providing funding and supervision. In such cases, the implementing agency usually is running several programs simultaneously, and often offers services to people with HIV, as well as conducts HIV prevention efforts. Depending on the funding situation, sometimes a stand-alone Project is possible, in which the only program that an organization conducts is the Mpowerment Project. Alternatively, a local university, hospital, or a private foundation may sponsor the Project. Although these possibilities occur less frequently, we mention them in order to highlight the different ways in which the Mpowerment Project can be funded. Sometimes a consortium of community agencies has attempted to sponsor the Project (although this is the most challenging of all ways that the Project is implemented).

The implementing agency plays a crucial role in successful implementation of the Project. The agency must ensure that the program has enough funding to succeed. Executive Directors can best support the Project when they have at least a basic understanding of the Project’s Core Elements and Guiding Principles, and allow the Coordinators and Core Group to make important decisions about their program. It is also helpful for Executive Directors to understand the need for the various Core Elements. Then they are more likely to provide adequate support for the Project, including directing that more fund-raising be done when it is determined that additional resources are needed in order to fully implement the Project. It is imperative for the Coordinators’ Supervisor to be knowledgeable about the intervention, provide ongoing supervision, help the Coordinators analyze their work, and hold the Coordinators accountable for carrying out their responsibilities. Typically Coordinators are young men who have had relatively little work experience, and often little experience in HIV/AIDS. A supervisor who can help them learn “the ropes” and provides support is invaluable to the smooth functioning of a well-run Project.

Funding agencies

Funders’ requirements and expectations, as well as sufficient funding for the Project, impact how well the Mpowerment Project is implemented. A variety of funding sources have been involved in providing support for the Mpowerment Project. We’ve seen Projects funded directly by the CDC, CDC pass-through money (funding given to a state HIV/AIDS prevention budget), state funding, private foundations, hospitals, local counties, and private fundraising. Often multiple sources of funding are used.

Wherever funding comes from, the number one issue for successful implementation of the Mpowerment Project—along with selecting the right staff as Coordinators—has been locating sufficient funding for the Project. In TRIP-1, many of the Mpowerment Projects we tracked had budgets that were too small for implementing parts of the intervention. Funding is challenging for HIV prevention. One funder we saw made the hard choice of consolidating
their funding into one grant that covered all parts of the intervention, rather than continuing what they had been doing previously which was funding several small grants at different agencies to cover separate parts of the Mpowerment Project. Once they made this decision, the Project ran much more smoothly.

We encourage funders to learn as much as possible about this intervention, since faulty planning from the start can doom Projects if the funding is so low or so restricted as to be unrealistic. While some amazing programs function with very little resources, it is imperative to fully fund the Mpowerment Project so that you reach young gay/bisexual men with an approach to HIV prevention that works.

Another issue also became apparent in our TRIP-1 study: occasionally health departments created contracts with the implementing agencies that did not contain the Core Elements or follow the Guiding Principles of the Mpowerment Project. In one locale, for example, the funding agency (which was the local health department) felt that the M-groups should involve multiple sessions rather than be a single session group. The M-group was made to be a single session because recruitment to a multi-session group takes substantial personnel, so much so that it is difficult to conduct other parts of the intervention with staff tied up getting participants to return. This made it nearly impossible to implement the Project with fidelity to the original evidence-based model. In another common occurrence, the health department that was funding the agency required that testing and counseling be included in the Mpowerment Project, and did not add any staff time to do this. This resulted in a reduced ability to implement the Project with fidelity since the agency did not have enough staff time to do all parts of it.
Core Elements of the Mpowerment Project

This section provides a brief overview of each of the Core Elements in the Mpowerment Project. For more detailed information about individual Core Elements, please refer to the appropriate module in this manual.

Each Core Element is essential, and all the elements work together synergistically to create an overall intervention program that is more than the sum of its components. For this reason, the intervention cannot be boiled down to just one or two elements—each relates to all of the others and needs to be in place for the overall Project to work effectively.

1 Core Group and volunteers

In keeping with the program’s empowerment philosophy, the Project is run by a group of volunteers, along with the paid staff. This group is called the “Core Group” and it consists of 10 to 20 young gay/bisexual men from the community, depending upon the size of the city or town. With the help of other volunteers, they coordinate and conduct all Project activities. The Core Group meets weekly and is empowered to make key Project decisions. These include deciding upon a name for the Project, planning Project activities, and developing Project materials. It is their job to think through what their young gay/bisexual men’s community needs, and how Project activities might meet those needs, while also infusing HIV prevention into all activities.

Other young men in the community may want to help with the Project but don’t have the time to be a member of the Core Group. These men can get involved in the Project in many ways, including helping out with a specific event, maintaining the Project Space, participating on the Outreach Team, and/or helping to publicize the Project. Input from Project volunteers is extremely important to the overall functioning and success of the Project. Each time a young gay/bisexual man volunteers for the Project, they encounter—and hopefully join—a community of young gay/bisexual men who support each other and who stress the importance of consistently having safer sex.

While the Core Group, together with paid staff, runs the Mpowerment Project, there are many ways that other volunteers can get involved.
2 Project Coordinators

Project Coordinators are the Project’s paid staff who are responsible for organizing all aspects of the Project, including volunteers and activities. They are the starting point for the diffusion process that spreads the safer sex message to young gay/bisexual men throughout the community. The Coordinators are a part of the Core Group. A main aspect of their job is to facilitate the empowerment of the young men who join the Project as volunteers. Calling them “Coordinators” is designed to call attention to the idea that they are not the directors of the program. Instead, it is their job to coordinate the various activities of the Project, and help young men make decisions and carry out the work of the Project. By doing so, they get to experience a sense of ownership of the Project and of the messages that the Project diffuses throughout the young men’s community.

3 Project space for young gay/bisexual men

Ideally the Project has its own physical space, which serves as the headquarters for the Project and as a community center for young gay/bisexual men. The Project space is where the Project holds most of its Social Outreach Events and staff meetings. During certain hours it also serves as a drop-in center where young men can meet and socialize. The center provides participants with information about other community organizations and services, and makes referrals to these agencies as appropriate. Safer sex materials are also freely available there. Having a Project space helps to address an important issue related to risk behavior among young gay/bisexual men—namely that they have no physical location to meet that promotes healthy sexual behavior and builds community among young gay/bisexual men.

4 Formal outreach

Formal outreach includes two components: an Outreach Team and Social Outreach Events. Outreach Teams of young men go to settings frequented by young gay/bisexual men to promote safer sex. This often includes “zaps” at local bars or a performance at the local community’s gay pride festival. Zaps are very brief activities that attract attention and promote safer sex in a fun and entertaining manner. Since most communities typically have few settings where young gay/bisexual men can socialize, a major aspect of the Mpowerment Project’s formal outreach is the creation of events that will attract young gay/bisexual men and where safer sex can be promoted (in accordance with the Project’s Guiding Principle that it contain a social focus). These are called Social Outreach Events. Young men who attend these events can then be invited to join other activities such as the Core Group and M-groups.
The Project sponsors a wide range of Social Outreach Events designed to appeal to each segment of the young gay/bisexual men’s community. Depending on the ideas generated by the Core Group, these activities can include weekly movie or TV nights, house events, skill-building workshops, sporting events, discussion groups, picnics, community forums, hikes, large dance events, and so forth. Mpowerment Project Outreach Events are designed to be enjoyable, and they are planned so that safer sex promotion can be incorporated into the event in some way. For example, at dance parties the Outreach Team may perform a theatrical performance piece to motivate young men about safer sex and generate interest in becoming involved with the Mpowerment Project. Likewise, a safer sex video may be shown during intermission at video parties. The Outreach Team uses playful, entertaining approaches to motivate young men about safer sex and HIV testing, and to encourage them to adopt and maintain safer behaviors over time. The Project also develops materials for distribution at its performances. These may include safer sex information and motivational messages, condoms, lubricants, and invitations to Mpowerment Project activities.

5 Informal Outreach

Informal outreach consists of young gay/bisexual men communicating with their friends in casual conversations about the need to engage in safer sex. The goal is to develop a process of communication that promotes safer sex across the entire community. Young men learn how to conduct informal outreach while attending the M-groups. In the groups, they are asked to make a commitment to speak with several of their friends, give them safer sex packages, and invite them to an M-group. Participants also receive buttons, key chain lanyards, or some other visible item with the Mpowerment Project logo, which they are asked to wear to show their support for the Project and its mission. It is hoped that these items may trigger conversations among their acquaintances about the Project. They also serve as a reminder to young men about the community norm for safer sex that the Project is seeking to establish.

Throughout the life of the Project, participants are reminded to talk with and encourage their friends to be safe sexually and to get tested for HIV regularly. In many communities there are subtle pressures that make it difficult for young men to talk with each other about personal or sensitive topics. To overcome these barriers, Coordinators can model informal outreach for everyone else in the program by continually discussing HIV prevention and testing with Core Group members and other young men in the Project. Seeing the Coordinators talking about having safer sex and getting HIV testing help motivate all Core Group members and other program participants to conduct informal outreach with their friends.
M-groups

M-groups are peer led, one-time meetings of 8 to 10 young gay/bisexual men. The groups last about three hours and are usually held at the Project space, but they can also be held in participants’ homes or at other locations convenient for young men. The M-groups Facilitator’s Guide should be followed closely, because each activity in the group has been carefully designed to target specific issues that cause young gay men to be at risk for HIV. In addition, the “flow” of the group was developed so that members discuss topics of a more general nature at the beginning, but get into more sensitive information over time, after participants feel more at ease.

The M-group focuses on factors identified in research as contributing to unsafe sex among young gay/bisexual men, and therefore seeks to:

- clear up misconceptions about safer sex
- increase the enjoyment of safer sex
- clarify understanding of how to use condoms correctly
- build communication skills for negotiating safer sex
- address interpersonal issues that may interfere with safer sex
- discuss the importance of knowing your HIV status and getting tested regularly
- teach men how to support their friends to have safer sex and get tested for HIV

Since not all men who engage in high-risk sexual behaviors are likely to attend these sessions, the M-groups also train participants how to talk informally with their friends outside the group to encourage them to practice safer sex. In this way, the men who do attend an M-group can carry the safer sex message to their friends and acquaintances who do not attend a group. The format of the M-group was developed through a series of focus groups with young gay/bisexual men. It is designed to be enjoyable and interactive, and includes structured exercises, informal discussion, and role-plays. The M-groups are promoted as a fun way for young gay/bisexual men to meet other young men, to find out about the Project, and to hear how other young men are dealing with issues of importance to them such as sex, dating, and relationships. All young men in the community who are interested in being involved with the Mpowerment Project are encouraged to attend an M-group as an introduction to the Project’s goals and philosophy.

The Project should strive to recruit 15-20% of the estimated number of young gay/bisexual men in the community to attend an M-group. According to diffusion theory, if this proportion of a population adopts an innovation—in this case, safer sex—the innovation can then be conveyed through the community’s natural social networks and bring about community-wide change.
Publicity

In order for the Project to succeed, it is vital that it has an appealing, ongoing, and dynamic publicity campaign to inform young men about the Project’s goals and activities and attract them to it. The Project uses a variety of approaches to reach young gay/bisexual men.

Publicity campaigns use:

- social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace)
- articles, columns, community listings, and advertisements in the alternative press, including gay newspapers and affiliated websites
- posters and flyers in settings frequented by young gay/bisexual men
- Internet web pages, chat rooms, and e-mail distribution lists
- “word of mouth” publicity by Core Group members and volunteers within their informal social networks
- university or local gay-themed radio shows
- palm cards and other invitations that participants can distribute to their friends

The publicity campaign’s goals are:

- to establish an awareness of the program and its legitimacy
- to invite young men to become involved with the program and its activities
- to provide a continual reminder of the norm for safer sex within the young gay/bisexual men’s community

The Mpowerment Project does not advertise via the mainstream media to avoid the program’s becoming known within the broader community as a program primarily for young gay/bisexual men. Young men who are not comfortable being associated with a publicly gay-identified organization are often reluctant to become involved in such groups. Keeping a low profile also minimizes the chances that homophobic individuals may become convinced that the Project is somehow “promoting homosexuality” and so attempt to obstruct its work or even shut it down.

Community Advisory Board

We consider the Community Advisory Board (CAB) to be an optional Core Element. Agencies may choose to have a CAB or to garner community support in other ways. If an agency organizes a CAB, it is the CAB’s role to assist the Core Group. The CAB is comprised of men and women from the AIDS, gay and lesbian, public health, and university communities. Board members meet monthly with the Core Group to offer advice on Project activities. They also
provide a link between the Project and their respective organizations and communities. One key role of the advisory board is to generate ideas and support for continuing the Project beyond the initial funding period of a grant. The CAB is not responsible for monitoring how funds are spent or for evaluating the program.

The Mpowerment Project remains relevant for young gay/bisexual Men

Since the Mpowerment Project is run by and for young gay/bisexual men and each Project tailors it to their own community so it is responsive to local needs, the Project always looks and feels current. M-groups are the only one of the Core Elements that is highly scripted (and we have recently updated the M-group curriculum to reflect current issues). The rest of the Mpowerment Project activities are always developed by each Project’s Core Group, which is intended to be representative of the local young gay/bisexual community.

In addition, even though there are more visible role models for young gay/bisexual men than there used to be, and although some states in the U.S. now support same-sex marriage, the issues that young gay/bisexual men face remain largely the same. Many experience homophobia and marginalization, isolation, a lack of support in the gay community for a healthy lifestyle, no discussions about healthy, positive sexual expression, few opportunities to talk openly about HIV and safer sex, few places where young gay/bisexual men can socialize, and families that do not necessarily accept their homosexuality. The Mpowerment Project provides answers to all of these challenges, and therefore remains quite relevant.

In addition, the Mpowerment Project remains highly relevant to issues surrounding HIV. For example, it is now widely accepted that sexually active people, including young gay/bisexual men, should get tested regularly for HIV,
so that men who are found to be HIV-positive can be monitored by their health care practitioners and begin treatment if needed. Getting into treatment may also reduce how infectious they are. Therefore, the Project now includes ideas about how to integrate HIV testing into its activities, with the intent to mobilize men to reduce their risk-taking behavior and to increase the numbers of young gay/bisexual men who know their current HIV status. But, as discussed elsewhere, the Mpowerment Project should not turn into a mechanism solely or predominantly for mobilizing the young men’s community for HIV testing, since an abundance of research has shown that when men test HIV-negative, most do not reduce their risky behaviors. Thus, they still need support for sexual risk reduction.

In recent years we have also seen an increased awareness of the importance of targeting social networks in HIV prevention efforts, something that was often ignored or downplayed earlier in the AIDS epidemic. The Mpowerment Project has always focused on social networks, by emphasizing conducting informal outreach to friends about the need for safer sex and testing, and by creating community through new social networks that are supportive about these issues.

Finally, as discussed earlier, there is an increasing awareness that an effective HIV prevention strategy for a community must focus on a variety of issues, and one level of intervention is insufficient. For example, while small group interventions have been shown to be effective, they only reach a limited number of men since many people do not like attending groups. In addition, it can be challenging for a young man who participates in a group that helps him to reduce his sexual risk-taking behaviors if he then returns to a community that is not supportive of his risk reduction efforts, or if he can only find other gay men by hooking up with men he meets online. Getting into treatment may also reduce how infectious they are.

The Mpowerment Project not only provides participants with the opportunity to take part in a small group intervention, but also seeks to build a community of caring peers around each young man that supports his risk reduction efforts. Likewise, while it is important for HIV-positive young men to receive high-quality health care and treatment, it is also critical for such men to belong to a community that doesn’t stigmatize them and is supportive of their taking their medications consistently. Because the Mpowerment Project focuses on issues
that exist at the individual, interpersonal, social, and structural/environmental levels, as well as focusing on biomedical prevention through supporting HIV-positive men to get into treatment, the Mpowerment Project remains an intervention that is both relevant and effective for the AIDS epidemic in the present time.

**Getting started**

The goal of this section is to guide you through the general steps for starting an Mpowerment Project in your community. Developing a time frame to start a Project differs from community to community and from budget to budget. Each community must adapt these steps to its Project’s goals, its funding for the program, and to the level of interest it is able to generate locally. Each of these steps is described in detail in the manual. It is important to refer to each relevant section of the manual as you go through the following 16 startup steps.

We hope that this section will be a useful tool to help you establish a reasonable, systematic timeline for creating your program’s operating structure and implementing the various program components. Keep in mind that many of these steps overlap. You can work on more than one simultaneously. You do not necessarily complete one step before beginning another. For example, you will be meeting with leaders in your community to promote awareness of your Project during the same time that you will be conducting your community assessment to establish a Core Group. In addition, many of these steps are ongoing once they have begun. For example, you will continue to conduct publicity and sponsor Social Outreach Events throughout the life of your Project.

**Step 1**

The Executive Director and HIV Prevention/Education Supervisor become familiar with the basic ideas of the Mpowerment Project. Review materials on mpowerment.org, including the Executive Director audio-slideshow (an online presentation that summarizes information critical for Executive Directors). Consult with Technical Assistance (TA) providers at the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (CAPS).

**Step 2**

Assess whether the agency is ready to implement the Mpowerment Project’s Core Elements, following the Guiding Principles (the Guiding Principles are explained earlier in this Module). Determine if the Mpowerment Project is a good fit for the agency and community.

**Step 3**

Secure adequate funding for the Project. (See Module 3: Implementing Agency for more information about funding issues.) Starting the Project with only a half-time staff person is unlikely to result in a well-functioning program. Technical Assistance (TA) providers from the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies can also help by providing sample proposals and budget information, and by reviewing draft proposals.
Step 4  Identify appropriate staff to serve as Coordinators for the Project by sending job announcements to agencies, by placing ads on appropriate Internet sites (e.g., craigslist), and by placing ads in local gay/bisexual, alternative, and university newspapers (See Module 4: Coordinators). Hiring staff that are appropriate for the intervention is one of the most important issues with respect to being able to implement the Project successfully.

Step 5  Hire and train Project Coordinator or Coordinators (See Module 3: Implementing Agency, and Module 4: Coordinators), reviewing materials on the Mpowerment website, and attending the three-day Mpowerment training.

Step 6  Perform baseline evaluations of sexual risk behavior among young gay/bisexual men in the community before starting to implement the Project (See Module 12: Evaluation).

Step 7  Coordinators conduct the community assessment (See Module 2: Community Assessment). This will help you to identify the different groups of young gay/bisexual men in the community, community resources, and people in the community who are relevant to the Project. It is important to note that this is not a “Needs Assessment,” which is generally a much larger, more complicated, and more expensive task.

Step 8  Meet with community leaders and relevant agencies to inform them of the Project (See Module 2: Community Assessment, Module 4: Coordinators, and Module 11: Community Advisory Board).

Step 9  Assemble a Core Group (See Module 5: Core Group). This involves 1) identifying potential Core Group members from the different segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community, and 2) convening a meeting with them in which the Project is described to them and they are invited to join the Core Group.

Step 10  Coordinators and the Core Group (with approval from implementing agency) locate a Project space and furnish it (See Module 6: Project Space).

Step 11  Identify and train additional M-group facilitators if you only have one Coordinator (See Module 9: M-groups and Module 13: M-group Facilitator’s Guide).

Step 12  Initiate Social Outreach Events to attract men to the Project and to begin community-building (See Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team).
Step 13
Begin the process of the Core Group selecting a Project name, logo, and tagline (See Module 5: Core Group and Module 10: Publicity), and identifying initial Social Outreach Events that the Core Group wants to conduct and attend (See Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team).

Step 14
Begin conducting Social Outreach Events. Projects often start off with a medium to large Social Outreach Event as a way of announcing the Project to the community. Other smaller Social Outreach Events are also started (See Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team).

Step 15
Develop Project promotional materials, develop publicity plan, and conduct publicity for Project and Social Outreach Events (See Module 10: Publicity).

Step 16
Meet with potential Community Advisory Board members, and invite them to join the Community Advisory Board (See Module 11: Community Advisory Board).

Hoped for results
Taken as a whole, the Mpowerment Project establishes a community mobilization process that is designed to be self-perpetuating, and that sets in motion an ever-widening diffusion process by which young men communicate with each other about HIV risk reduction. Given the ongoing, multifaceted nature of the intervention activities, it is hoped that virtually all young gay/bisexual men in the community will be reached through at least one of the Project activities. Ideally, most young gay/bisexual men will hear risk-reduction messages through several sources. If this happens, it is more likely that this message will sink in and that they will consistently practice safer sex.
Core Elements and their key characteristics

The following chart lists the Mpowerment Project’s 7 Core Elements and 1 Optional Element. Core Elements are intervention components that should be maintained with as much fidelity as possible to ensure program effectiveness. Key characteristics, listed in bullets, represent desired qualities about each Core Element. The key characteristics are based on the Guiding Principles of the Project. For example, the first key characteristic listed under the Core Group is “makes important decisions,” which is in accordance with the Guiding Principle of empowering young gay/bisexual men.

Core Group and Volunteers

- Make important decisions
- Base decisions on the Project’s Guiding Principles
- Membership has racial/ethnic/socioeconomic/educational background diversity
- Meetings are fun, social, productive, and scheduled regularly
- Engage in reflective analysis of all parts of Project, own role in Project, and own sexual risk behavior
- Address issues facing young gay/bisexual men
- Learn new skills and conduct meaningful/interesting work
- Support and encourage each other about safer sex
- Create a warm, appreciative, social, and welcoming atmosphere
Core Element 2

Coordinators
- Understand HIV prevention and community-building
- Knowledgeable about local young gay/bisexual men’s community
- Demonstrate leadership skills
- Oversee all Project activities
- Promote diverse racial/ethnic/socioeconomic involvement
- Support Core Group and volunteers to develop and implement activities
- Begin the safer sex diffusion process
- Engage in reflective analysis of all parts of Project, own role in Project, and issues facing young gay/bisexual men

Core Element 3

Project Space
- Safe and comfortable
- Accessible and appealing location
- Safer sex and HIV testing promotional posters and literature on display
- Condoms and lubricant available
- Referral information available

Core Element 4

Formal Outreach
- Promotes safer sex and HIV testing
- Includes an Outreach Team that goes to venues to distribute safer sex and HIV testing promotional materials and conducts engaging performances
- Helps build community
- Hosts Social Outreach Events that provide social opportunities and promote HIV prevention and are fun and appealing
- Creates opportunities for positive peer influence
- Recruits for M-groups and other Project activities
- Empowers Project volunteers
- Scheduled regularly
Informal Outreach
- Diffuses a norm of safer sex
- Uses peer influence to change behavior
- Achieved through nonjudgmental and supportive peer interactions
- Reinforced through other Project activities

M-groups
- Facilitated by well-trained and skilled Project staff and/or volunteers
- Address issues that are important to young gay/bisexual men
- Create social opportunities
- Eroticize safer sex
- Teach and motivate informal outreach
- Teach sexual negotiation skills
- Encourage Project involvement and volunteerism
- Scheduled regularly

Publicity Campaign
- Creates attractive and informative materials
- Reminds young gay/bisexual men to practice safer sex
- Reaches all young gay/bisexual men in community
- Targets young gay/bisexual men, not general community

Community Advisory Board
- Serves as resource for Core Group
- Does not have day to day decision-making power
- Uses available local expertise
- Not a required Core Element
Effectiveness of the Mpowerment Project

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Mpowerment Project, researchers chose two mid-sized communities where the Mpowerment Project could be implemented and evaluated. The two communities were Eugene, OR and Santa Barbara, CA. Before the Mpowerment Project was implemented in either community, young gay/bisexual men in both communities were surveyed about their sexual behavior in order to obtain baseline information. The Mpowerment Project was then implemented in Eugene for eight months. During this time, Santa Barbara was without an Mpowerment Project, although safer sex posters were placed by other agencies at the city’s only gay bar, at HIV testing sites, and on the college campus.

When the Mpowerment Project ended in Eugene, young gay/bisexual men in both communities were again surveyed. The Mpowerment Project was then implemented in Santa Barbara. At the end of the Mpowerment Project in Santa Barbara, the young gay/bisexual men in both communities were surveyed for a third time.

Impact on sexual risk behavior

The Mpowerment Project has been shown to reduce rates of unprotected anal intercourse among young gay/bisexual men in communities in which it has been implemented. As shown in the figure below, following implementation of the program in Eugene, the rates of unprotected anal intercourse reported by young gay/bisexual men decreased from 41% to 30%. Thus, the rates of men who reported engaging in any unprotected anal intercourse decreased by 27% from pre-intervention levels. Specifically, there was a 45% reduction in unprotected anal intercourse from pre-intervention levels with non-primary partners, and a 24% reduction from pre-intervention levels with boyfriends. These declines represent changes that were occurring within the entire young gay/bisexual community, and not just among those men who had participated in the program. In Santa Barbara, where the intervention had not yet occurred, the rates for unprotected anal intercourse remained stable at 39% and 40%.
The program was then implemented in Santa Barbara. The program’s effectiveness was replicated there, with researchers observing similar declines in rates of unprotected anal intercourse. Our second study looked at the impact of the Mpowerment Project after antiretroviral medications (ARVs) became available. Our data showed that the intervention resulted in a slight decrease (12%) in risk behavior among young gay/bisexual men in Albuquerque, NM where an Mpowerment Project had been operating for one year. During the same time period we also surveyed men in two other comparison communities that at the time did not have an Mpowerment Project. There the risk behaviors rose dramatically. Young gay/bisexual men in Phoenix, AZ reported a 24% increase in unprotected anal sex, and young men in Austin, TX reported a 42% increase. Thus, this analysis showed the Mpowerment Project successfully staved off an increase in risk behavior.

**Intervention activities most likely to reach high risk-taking men**

The ability to reach young gay/bisexual men who engage in high-risk sexual practices is critical to a successful HIV prevention program. Therefore, we examined the data from evaluation surveys to identify which program activities were most successful in reaching these men. The table below provides a breakdown of the results. These results show what proportion of men who were in our evaluation surveys participated in the various parts of the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM ACTIVITY</th>
<th>% PARTICIPATING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heard of Mpowerment Project</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced outreach activities</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended large outreach events</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a video night or visited center</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received invite from friend to M-group</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended an M-group</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped with formal outreach</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Core Group</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, the high risk-taking men were most likely to be reached by Social Outreach Events and outreach (whether via formal or informal channels). However, many were also reached by their friends who had previously attended M-groups and had then become more involved in Mpowerment.
Project programs. Although many of the men who attended groups were not engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors, some of the friends they contacted were. Therefore, although M-groups should not be considered the most important part of the Mpowerment Project, they do have the potential to reach many more men than actually attend them.

For more information on the evaluation study, see the following two articles, available on mpowerment.org:


Cost Effectiveness of Project

We conducted a cost-effectiveness analysis of the Mpowerment Project. We were able to estimate how many HIV infections were avoided by implementing the Mpowerment Project. We then compared the cost of HIV infections with the cost of the program and found that the Mpowerment Project was cost-effective. In fact, it is one of the most cost effective HIV prevention programs that have been assessed. The results of the cost-effectiveness study can be found in: Kahn, J., Kegeles, S.M., Hays R, Beltzer N. (2001). Cost-effectiveness of the Mpowerment Project, a community-level intervention for young gay men. Journal of Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus and Human Retroviruses, 27, 482-491. Two other independent research teams have also examined the Mpowerment Project by comparison to other approaches to HIV prevention, and found that the Project is quite cost effective (Holtgrave, Pinkerton, & Merson, 2002; Cohen, Wu, & Farley, 2005). The second study, by the RAND Corporation, examined how federal prevention spending could be optimized to prevent the highest number of new HIV infections. They showed that compared with other HIV prevention strategies, the Mpowerment Project had the potential to prevent the greatest number of new HIV infections, in a cost-effective manner.
References


(Note: This is an abbreviated version of the Guiding Principles meant to be used as a quick reference tool. More detailed information about each Guiding Principle can be found earlier in this module.)

1. **Young Men Are Very Concerned With Social and Self-Esteem Issues**
   The first Guiding Principle is that a successful HIV prevention intervention for young gay/bisexual men needs to tie HIV risk reduction to the satisfaction of other needs, such as developing friendships, having fun, and enhancing self-esteem.

2. **Peer Influences Are Strong Among Young Gay/Bisexual Men**
   The second Guiding Principle is that for the Mpowerment Project to be effective in reaching young gay/bisexual men, it needs to be peer-based and use peer influence.

3. **Building a Healthy Community Among Young Gay/Bisexual Men**
   The third Guiding Principle is that it is essential to build a young gay/bisexual men's community where men support each other about sexual risk reduction and obtaining HIV testing, where the social norms and expectations support HIV prevention, and where men help each other in coping with the stresses of being gay/bisexual.

4. **Empowerment Promotes More Lasting Changes in Behavior**
   The fourth Guiding Principle is that the Project serves a mobilizing and empowering function within the young gay/bisexual men's community—young men take ownership of the Project rather than having others carry out the Project for them.

5. **Community-Wide Change Occurs Through Interpersonal Networks**
   The fifth Guiding Principle is that community change comes about through “diffusion,” a process of informal communication and modeling by peers within their friendship networks.

   The sixth Guiding Principle of the Mpowerment Project is that the program enriches and strengthens young gay/bisexual men's pride about who they are and encourages them to explore and celebrate their sexuality by not just focusing on condom use but by including a wide variety of safer sexual behaviors.

7. **A “multi-level” HIV prevention program for young gay/bisexual men is needed.**
   The seventh Guiding Principle is the need for a “multi-level” approach to address the variety of factors that influence young men's risk behavior and HIV test-seeking. Since young gay/bisexual men engage in unsafe sex for a variety of reasons, interventions that focus solely on one level of factors will miss men who engage in unsafe sex for other reasons. Therefore, the Mpowerment Project, sometimes called a “combination HIV prevention approach”, targets both sexual risk reduction as well as biomedical issues by encouraging testing and treatment for HIV-positive men.
### Core Elements

1. Coordinator(s)
2. Core Group & Other Volunteers
3. Project Space
4. **Formal Outreach**  
   (including Social Outreach Events & Outreach Teams)
5. M-Groups
6. **Informal Outreach**  
   (which is a focus on talking with & encouraging friends & acquaintances to be safe & get tested for HIV)
7. Publicity Campaign
8. **Community Advisory Board**  
   (Optional)

### Guiding Principles

- **Social Focus**
- **Empowerment Philosophy**
- **Peer Influence of Safer Sex Messages**
- **Multi-Level Approach**
- **Gay-Positive/Sex-Positive**
- **Community-Building**
- **Diffusion of Innovations**
Community Assessment—Knowing Your Community

Objectives
To provide tools and guidance to help identify and describe:

1. the different groups of young gay/bisexual men in the community, how to reach them, and what activities might appeal to them;
2. what community resources and organizations might be useful to the Project; and
3. who would be good to have on the Core Group and Community Advisory Board.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module
- Figure 2.1 Community Assessment Results from Albuquerque, NM

What you’ll find in the Appendix to Module 12: Evaluation
- Figure 12.3 Community Assessment Interview for Young Gay/Bi Men
- Figure 12.4 Community Assessment Data Recording Form
- Figure 12.5 Community Assessment Interview for Community Leaders
Once the Project Coordinators have been hired, one of the very first steps in implementing the Mpowerment Project is to gather information that will provide you with a comprehensive understanding of your community and the experiences of young gay/bisexual men who live there. It will also be helpful to know how the community has responded to HIV/AIDS and what HIV prevention approaches have been tried there. All of these things are part of a Community Assessment, a method of learning about your community. In order to conduct an accurate Community Assessment, it is helpful to develop a “map” of what life is like for young gay/bisexual men in the community, and then determine how to create an HIV prevention program that will work best for these men.
The Community Assessment should be conducted at the start of the Project and then yearly or on an as-needed basis, because the young gay/bisexual men’s community continually changes over time. The best way to run a successful Project is to know who makes up the young men’s community in your area. (See the Appendix to Module 12: Evaluation for Figure 12.3 Community Assessment Interview for Young Gay/Bisexual Men, Figure 12.4 Community Assessment Data Recording Form, and Figure 12.5 Community Assessment Interview for Community Leaders.)

When is a good time to complete a Community Assessment?

- When a Project is first started
- Yearly or biannually
- When funding is renewed
- If there is significant staff turnover or new Coordinators are hired
- When a Project needs to be reenergized
- As an exercise to inform the Core Group and volunteers about the goals of the Project
- As a way to promote the Project within the young men’s community
- When a funder requires it

Questions

Before starting to implement the program, the following questions should be answered:

- What are the different groups of young gay/bisexual men in the community?
- What issues are these men grappling with?
- Where do they socialize or congregate?
- What organizations or activities in your community attract young gay/bisexual men?
- What media do young gay/bisexual men pay attention to?
- What community resources might be useful to the Project?
- What young gay/bisexual men might be helpful to have on the Core Group?
- What kinds of activities might appeal to young men in the community?
- What community elders might be helpful to have on the Community Advisory Board?
Who conducts the Community Assessment?

We have found that Community Assessments work best when the Project Coordinators carry out most of the Community Assessment activities. There are two reasons for this. First, once the Project is up and running, the Coordinators will continually need to draw upon the information gained from the assessment. They will be more familiar with the information by being centrally involved in its collection. Second, the first time the assessment is conducted, the process of conducting it begins the program’s diffusion process. This is one of the Project’s Guiding Principles: diffusing awareness about the program throughout the community (as well as diffusing the messages about safer sex and testing).

The Community Assessment that is conducted at the start of the Project occurs at a critical period. Since a lot of the information collected comes from interviews with young gay/bisexual men, these interviews are the first time that they begin to learn that such a program is coming into existence and that their input will have an impact on it. Therefore, it is important that all information given out about the program at this time is clear and consistent, and that the people who represent the program at this early point are the Project Coordinators.

However, there are also some Community Assessment tasks that do not involve meeting with young gay/bisexual men, and these can be conducted by other agency staff.
Important things to know about the young gay/bisexual men’s community

1 The different groups of young gay/bisexual men

The Mpowerment Project strives to reach all of the young gay/bisexual men in the community. In order to do this, it is important to be aware of the many different groups of young men within the community. (See Figure 2.1 in the Appendix to this module for a sample list of the different major groups of young gay/bisexual men that were identified in Albuquerque prior to starting the Mpowerment Project.) In addition to finding out what different groups exist, it is also important to learn what they do in their spare time and where they do it.

Understandably, we are all most familiar with people like ourselves. Regardless of who the Project Coordinators are and how long they have lived in the community, it is unlikely that they will know everything there is to know about all of its social groups. Conducting a Community Assessment gives the Project Coordinators the opportunity to gain insights into the various segments of the community beyond the ones they already know. In fact, what we have observed time and time again is that when Coordinators conduct a Community Assessment, they are surprised to learn about new groups that they had not been aware of before.

The information collected about the community’s various social groups will be useful to the Project in several ways. First, it will be invaluable in organizing a Core Group, since the Core Group should be comprised of young men who represent different segments of the community. Second, it will be important to the Project’s ongoing evaluation efforts, which attempt to measure whether Project activities are reaching all parts of the community.

For example, it will be helpful to observe which men attend the Social Outreach Events. This will help the Project Coordinators and Core Group determine whether special outreach activities may need to be developed to attract particular groups that did not show up. Likewise, it is helpful to assess whether Outreach Team performances are being conducted at places where all groups of men can be reached, or whether outreach efforts need to be broader to reach more men. This is why having basic information about the various groups of young gay/bisexual men, where they congregate, what they like to do, and so forth can help both in the development of the program and in its ongoing evaluation.

2 Where young gay/bisexual men socialize

It is important to determine where young men congregate and socialize in the community and what these places are like. In some communities there may be many places, while in others very few. To find out where young men socialize in the community, young gay/bisexual men should be asked the following questions about their gathering places:

- What groups go to this place (e.g., other non-gay/bisexual groups)?
- Do young gay/bisexual men frequent this space on particular days or times?
Typical places where young gay/bisexual men meet to socialize might include bars, clubs, cafes, parks, college campuses, and gyms. At each of these locations, it will be important to know which groups of young men attend and if there are particular days or times when different groups frequent the site.

An important next task is to determine if publicity and outreach can be conducted at these locations. Determine if posters and other publicity and outreach material can be distributed or posted at these locations, and if outreach activities such as performances or the distribution of safer sex promotional materials can be conducted at the spaces. Before discussing the possibility of conducting outreach at an establishment with its manager or owner, we recommend talking with others in the community. They can describe the history of such attempts, and particularly what approaches have been successful or unsuccessful in the past.

Many communities have a gay bar, and larger communities will often have more than one. Frequently there is a bar that is more popular with young men, and this may change over time. In the experience of the Mpowerment Project, frequently one bar is popular for several months, but then another bar makes some changes (remodels, opens particular nights with a fun theme, etc.) and becomes more inviting. It is important to monitor these changes.

3 How young gay/bisexual men meet each other online

With the popularity of social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, many young men are now meeting their peers online. A majority of Mpowerment Projects have created their own profiles, groups, and/or fan pages. However, there’s no guarantee that popular sites today will be popular
in the future. Online preferences can change quickly, so it is important to keep current on the usage of online networking sites.

To find out how men in your area are using the Internet, you might want to informally poll guys on the Core Group or at Social Outreach Events. Ask:

- Do you use a social networking site? Which one? (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Friendster, Connexion? Other?)
- Which one do you prefer, or spend the most time on?
- How frequently do you check this site/these sites (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly)?
- How do you use this site/these sites (e.g., check up on other friends, reading status updates, getting news, checking email, blogging, participating in discussions)?
- Do you use a dating or personals site (e.g. Adam4Adam, gay.com, manhunt.net)?
- How frequently do you check these sites (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly)?
- Is there an online site that you check for local gay news and information?

Social networking sites offer a convenient way to reach out and engage members of the community about your Project. Promotional materials can be uploaded to these sites and shared among a wide variety of young men instantaneously. They also allow your Project to become an online magnet for other young men to meet each other and to know what your Project is up to.

**MySpace** MySpace allows Projects to create a free online profile that acts as a “friend” to other members. This simple act allows Projects to expand the number of people they can interact with online by meeting your friend’s friends, and their friends’ friends. Once a Project joins MySpace and creates a profile, it can invite its friends to join MySpace. A Project can also browse MySpace for other young gay/bisexual men in your area who are already members.

Under the “Friends” tab, choose “Browse People,” then click on the “Advanced” tab. From here a Project can set browse criteria that include zip codes, age ranges, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Straight, Gay, Bi, Not Sure). A Project can quickly expand their friend network just be searching for other young gay/bisexual men in their area.

**Facebook** Facebook allows for two networking tools, creating a group or creating a fan page. Although both groups and fan pages are excellent ways to promote your Project, we suggest agencies maintain a fan page rather than a group page for the following reasons.

- Fan pages are not associated with profiles, whereas groups are connected to individuals. If there is a change of Project Coordinators, a fan page allows for a seamless transition to the next Coordinators.
Sharing with fans is easier. With a page you can send messages about events, volunteer reminders, and new Project updates.

Fan pages function more like a users profile page and include a wall, feed, photos, videos, and list of fans.

One way to capture quick survey information from online participants is to use a survey Internet site such as Survey Monkey (SurveyMonkey.com). Basic subscribers (free accounts) are limited to 10 questions and 100 respondents per survey. A Project can control the color and look of the survey and upload a Project logo. You can then place a link to the survey on the Project website, and on its page on Facebook and MySpace.

4 Local media that reach young gay/bisexual men

In order to communicate with the broadest cross section of young gay/bisexual men in the community about Project activities, it is advisable to use all available resources, including the local media and the Internet. To do this, it will be important to identify the media and Internet sources that exist in the community, and then determine which ones reach young gay/bisexual men.

Since this information is especially relevant in considering publicity for the Project, these issues are discussed further in Module 10: Publicity.

Here are some questions to help survey local media:

- Are there any newspapers that reach young gay/bisexual men? For example, is there a gay newspaper, an alternative newspaper, or a student newspaper?
- How often are these published?
- Do young gay/bisexual men read them? Do men of the ethnic/racial group(s) the Project is focusing on read them?
- What are the deadlines to place advertisements in these newspapers, and how much do ads cost?
- Are there places in these publications, such as calendars or event listings, where Project activities can be listed for free?
- Is there a radio show that reaches young gay/bisexual men? (Many university radio stations, and some community public radio stations produce programs on gay issues.)
- Are there community bulletin boards where flyers can be placed? Is there a gay neighborhood where flyers can be hung?
- Is there a local gay website?
- What social networking sites do young men in the community prefer or use the most? (i.e., MySpace, Facebook, Twitter?)
Community resources the Project can draw upon

It is also important to know what services and resources are already available for young gay/bisexual men in the community so that appropriate referrals can be made and so that the Project doesn’t duplicate efforts of other agencies.

The first thing to do is to identify local community organizations that provide services to young gay/bisexual men. Some of the agencies to investigate include universities and colleges, public health and medical clinics, and local mental health service providers. Also look for gay community resources such as a gay community center, support groups for coming out issues, and gay social groups.

Get to know your local organizations. Establishing contacts and building alliances with other community organizations that serve young gay/bisexual men can be mutually beneficial for the Project and for these other organizations.

Investigate if there are gay student organizations at the local colleges and universities. If so, find out who their leaders are and who is involved with each organization. You may also want to determine if there are any university professors who teach courses that reach many young gay/bisexual men, such as courses on gay literature, gay history, queer culture, and so forth. Professors who teach these topics may have insight to offer about young gay/bisexual students at the universities and how to reach them.

It will also be important to know where young men in the community can go for medical help, particularly for HIV and STD testing and treatment. So that the Project can make referrals to such places, it is helpful to know which organizations have services specifically geared to young gay/bisexual men, or are particularly sensitive to young gay/bisexual men’s health issues. Projects that focus on one particular ethnic/racial group will want to make extra certain that the men they serve will feel comfortable visiting these testing sites. The best way to find this out is to have Project volunteers visit the facilities and report back on their findings.

For example, if the Project is focusing on young African American gay/bisexual men, visit the clinics to find out where they are located, and whether young African American men would be comfortable using their services. Sometimes going to a clinic located in the heart of the Black community is uncomfortable for gay/bisexual men because family and friends might see them. On the other hand, attending a clinic in an all-white area of a city may also be quite uncomfortable for many Black men. Find out if African Americans are on staff at the clinic, and what is the reputation of the clinic in terms of providing services to African American men who have sex with other men.

Likewise, it is very helpful to identify local psychotherapists who are skilled in working with young gay/bisexual men. These therapists should also be familiar with the Project.
It is also important to be able to provide referrals to organizations that aid young men in finding educational and career opportunities. If possible, have on hand written materials to provide referrals to such agencies. Some Projects have also organized groups or workshops on developing new skills such as “how to interview for a job,” “how to hold a job,” and “how to write a resume.”

Next, identify any organized social activities that may already exist for young gay/bisexual men in the community. For example, there may be a hiking club that attracts younger men, or a gay community center that offers a discussion group specifically for younger gay/bisexual men. Also find out if there used to be other activities for young men that are no longer offered. If so, try to find out what happened, and why they were discontinued.

Potential agency referrals in the community

University or college LGBT group
Community college LGBT group
LGBT community centers
Other LGBT social groups (men, women, transgender)
PLFLAG (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
www.pflag.org
Transgender support groups
Local pride committee
LGBT affirming churches/synagogues
Mental health providers
Local gay affirming psychotherapists
Substance use treatment sites
LGBT substance use groups (i.e., LGBT Alcoholics Anonymous)
Suicide prevention hotline
STD clinics
HIV testing sites
Local AIDS service organizations that provide HIV/AIDS treatment
AmeriCorps

It will also be important to determine potential sites within the community for holding Project activities. For example, a particular gay-owned or gay-friendly cafe may be willing to host weekly Social Outreach Events for young gay/bisexual men. There may be an individual who is willing to rent out—or better yet, make available at no charge—a large hall for dances. Perhaps there is an auditorium that would be ideal for community forums. Such resources should be investigated.
Identifying community leaders supportive of the young gay and bisexual men’s community

In every community there are certain individuals whose opinions carry enormous weight and who exert great influence on what happens there. Often these people hold official positions that give them their power, such as a city councilmember, director of a social service agency, or business owner. These can also include a business owner whose business is of relevance to this Project, such as a bar owner/manager, a newspaper owner, or someone who produces gay community events. Most communities also have leaders who hold no formal position and have acquired their influence solely through personal characteristics or their history of involvement in the community.

These individuals’ opinions about the Project are extremely important and can, in many ways, influence the Project’s success. As a first step, Project staff should brainstorm a list of key community leaders, and then discuss how to gain their support for the Project. Next, ask friends, coworkers, and staff at other agencies for names of possible community leaders. It is a good idea to meet with each of these influential persons to inform them about the Project, ask for their advice, and enlist their support.

If it is determined that it would be helpful to have a Community Advisory Board, then it is useful to assess whether these people should be asked to join it. (See Module 11: Community Advisory Board for more information.)
Ways of collecting Community Assessment information

There are a number of different methods that can be used to collect useful information about your community. Certainly the best source of information about young gay/bisexual men is men themselves. Much of what a Project needs to know can be learned by talking directly with young men, as well as through discreet and unobtrusive observation at places frequented by young gay/bisexual men. It is also helpful to interview key people in the community who are knowledgeable about:

- The different groups within the young gay/bisexual male population
- Relevant issues in the larger gay community that may affect the Project
- The history of HIV prevention approaches already tried in the community

Below we discuss five methods of obtaining information about the community: 1) Community Assessment interviews, 2) longer interviews with leaders, 3) focus groups, 4) participant observations, and 5) printed materials. We strongly recommend that you look at the material in Module 12: Evaluation when deciding whether or not to use these methods and how to conduct them.

Community Assessment interviews with young gay/bisexual men

The quickest and simplest way of collecting information about the young gay/bisexual men’s community is to conduct a number of Community Assessment interviews. These are brief interviews lasting about 15 minutes that are conducted wherever you find young gay/bisexual men, such as at gay bars, cafes, gay student unions, gay organizations, local chatrooms, and so forth. The Community Assessment interviews are not particularly personal,
and do not ask the individual about his sexual risk behavior, but instead focus on group experiences. Men do not need to be paid for these interviews because they are quite brief. (See the Appendix to Module 12: Evaluation for Figure 12.3 Community Assessment Interview for Young Gay/Bisexual Men, Figure 12.4 Community Assessment Data Recording Form, and Figure 12.5 Community Assessment Interview for Community Leaders.)

Using Community Assessment interviews as a part of conducting the Community Assessment is particularly useful when beginning the Mpowerment Project. These interviews can identify the various groups of young gay/bisexual men in the community and provide a deeper understanding of each group. They can also highlight needs that are being met by various community resources, as well as those that remain unmet. This new knowledge can then be used to create more effective programs.

In general, Community Assessment interviews are an effective method that can be used throughout the Project, at any time, to get quick input from young gay/bisexual men in the community. Project staff and volunteers can then use this input to make more informed decisions about the program. For example, Community Assessment interviews can provide reactions to potential names for the Project, suggestions for Project events and locations, or information about where to publicize Project activities. Community Assessment interviews can provide a “snapshot” of what young men think about a particular topic.

**Conduct interviews privately**

It is important to conduct all interviews (whether for the Community Assessment or when you are trying to determine other information) in a relatively private place, such as at a corner of a bar or at a table that is a distance away from other tables in a cafe. This way, young men will feel free to say whatever they want to the interviewer without feeling embarrassed that others might overhear them. If the topic is of an extremely personal nature, however, such as about one’s sexual behavior, then it is preferable to arrange to conduct these interviews in a more private place.

**Interview diverse groups of young gay/bisexual men**

It is critical that diverse groups of young gay/bisexual men be interviewed in order to get a comprehensive view of the community. Interview men of
different races/ethnicities, social crowds, ages, vocations, students, and non-students. Plan on interviewing at least 20 to 35 young men. As long as the interviews reveal new information or opinions, continue interviewing additional men. However, the interviewing process can be stopped once you notice you are getting much of the same information over and over (as long as you aren’t only interviewing guys from the same social groups).

Record the information

When conducting interviews, have a pen and paper ready so you can take notes. You can also arrange to bring a laptop to record responses. Writing down what the person says demonstrates a respect for someone’s opinions. This also ensures that when the interview is over, you have an accurate, detailed record of what was said. Since the Community Assessment interviews are short, there is no need to tape record responses. (See Figure 12.4 in the Appendix to Module 12: Evaluation for a sample Community Assessment Data Recording Form.)

In keeping with the Guiding Principle that the social aspects of the program should be emphasized rather than describing the Project as an HIV prevention program, it is important not to refer to the program as “a new HIV prevention program” during the interviews or when recruiting men to be interviewed. The Project should always be marketed as a program to build a strong, empowered community of young gay/bisexual men that focuses on a lot of different issues, and the HIV prevention aspects of the program are only one of many topics addressed.

Once the Community Assessment interviews have been conducted and recorded, the information needs to be sorted and compiled. (See the Appendix to Module 12: Evaluation for Figure 12.4 Community Assessment Data Recording Form). Organize the information by the various groups of young gay/bisexual men. For example, keep together all the information you’ve recorded about students, or “artsy” men, or Ball kids (e.g., where they hang out, how many men are part of the group, age range, etc.) until you have covered every group. When you’re done, you should have a fairly comprehensive overview concerning the local young gay/bisexual men’s community. (See Figure 2.1 in the Appendix to this module for a sample Community Assessment Data Recording Form from Albuquerque, NM.)

Interviews with community leaders

In addition to speaking with young gay/bisexual men, it is also helpful to learn community leaders’ experiences and perspectives on a variety of issues concerning young gay/bisexual men in the community. (See Figure 12.5 in the Appendix to Module 12: Evaluation for a sample Community Assessment Interview for Community Leaders). This may include their perceptions about young gay/bisexual men in terms of their risk-taking behavior, the history of attempts to work with them on HIV prevention, what community resources are available for these men, and the extent to which these resources are being used. For example, some of the leaders might be able to tell you that a particular bar manager has been quite amenable to HIV prevention efforts when they are conducted in a certain way, or that a cafe owner has been willing to host particular social events for the gay community.
Since interviews with community leaders generally take an hour or longer, it is important to make this clear when setting up the interview. During the interview it may also be helpful to describe the function of the Community Advisory Board and ask if the community leader might be interested in participating in it. However, don’t promise that he/she will be asked to join, since later it might be determined that he or she is not the best person for that role.

During the interview, take notes as those interviewed answer each question. Shortly after the interview, write out these responses in greater detail. As a safeguard, you may wish to ask for permission to call back if you need to clarify something. Before concluding each interview, remember to ask for referrals to others who are knowledgeable about these issues, and then interview them as well.

**Consider conducting focus groups of young gay/bisexual men**

Another way of gathering information for the Community Assessment is through the use of focus groups with young men. A focus group is a discussion among a carefully selected group of people, guided by a trained moderator, that explores a specific topic.

Focus groups are most suitable for issues that are likely to become clearer through group discussion and the reflection it generates. They often work well when trying to get individuals to explain widely held beliefs or practices. For example, to understand why previous attempts to attract young gay/bisexual men haven’t been very successful, a couple of different focus groups of young gay/bisexual men could be conducted to get impressions about what has and has not been effective in reaching them. The themes that emerge from the focus group could then be tested later through interviews or focus groups with a different population (e.g., service providers). Thus, group discussion that occurs in the focus groups would help to direct subsequent information gathering.

Focus groups are good at generating preliminary information quickly, and therefore can be helpful when conducting a Community Assessment. Four two-hour focus groups of ten members each can be conducted in two days. In comparison, it would be difficult to hold 40 two-hour interviews in the same time. On the other hand, it takes substantial effort to locate and schedule 40 individuals willing to participate in focus groups, and it may be necessary to pay people to participate in two-hour groups (versus not paying them for shorter individual interviews). Module 12: Evaluation discusses in greater detail the pros and cons and how to conduct focus groups. Also keep in mind that it is possible to explore the same topics using both focus groups and individual interviews. Sometimes you will get a more complete picture this way. (See Figure 12.2 in the Appendix to Module 12: Evaluation for a Sample Focus Group Guide.)
Conduct participant observations

Participant observation is just what it sounds like: you go out and watch what is happening in your community. Sometimes it is helpful to supplement information gained from Community Assessment interviews or focus groups with observational data. For example, you may want to directly observe some of the social groups that were described in the Community Assessment interviews. Sometimes interviews or focus groups yield conflicting information, and direct observation can help to resolve such conflicting information. For instance, you might wish to go to the locations that were identified as popular meeting places to observe if and when young men do, indeed, congregate there. If these locales do turn out to be meeting places, characteristics of the group can be observed, such as how members dress, their ages, what they do, and with whom they socialize. By observing and discreetly taking notes, you can begin to understand young gay/bisexual men’s lives in a way that will help you plan Mpowerment Project activities, recruit participants, and forge useful alliances.

When another organization is conducting outreach with gay/bisexual men, it can be extremely informative to notice how young gay/bisexual men respond to these outreach efforts. For instance, we have observed that when a lesbian and gay student union set up a booth at a university-wide function, many students went out of their way to avoid the booth so as not to be seen expressing interest in it by fellow students. This type of observational research will help you make decisions about what events and approaches might or might not be used to promote safer sex or the Project. For instance, if young gay/bisexual men are observed avoiding gay-related booths in mainstream environments, you may logically conclude that this will not be a very productive way to promote the Project.

Collect printed materials

There exists a wealth of printed materials that will be helpful in assessing the community. Skim current and past issues of local gay and alternative newspapers and websites, looking for information about social events and topics of interest to young gay/bisexual men, methods of advertising upcoming events, and community resources. It is also useful to collect copies of brochures and other information issued by relevant agencies and organizations in the community. As discussed previously, not only is it valuable to keep informed of what other community agencies are doing, it is also important to know what services they offer so that the Project can refer young men to them.
# Community Assessment Results from Albuquerque, NM

A sample list of the different major groups of young gay/bisexual men that were identified in Albuquerque prior to starting the Mpowerment Project, and information about the groups.

*Note: Pulse, Ranch, Foxes and AMC are bars; UNM is the University of New Mexico; TVI is the Technology Vocational Institute*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Meeting Spot</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bar Crowd</strong></td>
<td>Pulse, Ranch, AMC</td>
<td>21+</td>
<td>Gay, Bi</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence: All Over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx Size: Large</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to Join: 21 or older</td>
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<tr>
<td>Likes: Dancing, socializing, drinking, sex</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dislikes: Expensive, repetitive, no real community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misc Comments: People go until they get a boyfriend</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grunge Kids</strong></td>
<td>Nob Hill, UNM</td>
<td>15-22</td>
<td>Mostly Straight</td>
<td>M, F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence: Nob Hill, Heights, Rio Rancho</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approx Size: Small</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: White</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Join: Clothes, attitude</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dislikes:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Misc Comments:</td>
<td>Hippie types, socially conscious, anti-social</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Closed</strong></td>
<td>Public sex spots, cruise, adult video stores, Internet</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Gay, Bi</td>
<td>M, F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residence: All Over</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Join: Don't come out</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes: Public acceptance, kids, family support</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislikes:</td>
<td>Sexually dissatisfied, lack of others like self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drag Queens</strong></td>
<td>Pulse, Ranch, AMC, And Foxes</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Gay, Bi, And Straight</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence: All Over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Approx Size: Small</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to Join: Be into drag scene</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Likes: Performing, entertaining, creative outlet</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislikes:</td>
<td>Misc. Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless/ Street Kids</strong></td>
<td>The Cruise, Knob Hill, Downtown, Shelters</td>
<td>&lt;30</td>
<td>Gay, Bi, and Straight</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence: All Over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Approx Size: Small</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to Join: Be rejected by family</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Likes:</td>
<td>Diseases, insecurity, danger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dislikes:</td>
<td>Misc. Comments: Includes drag queens and prostitutes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gay Frat Boys</strong></td>
<td>Backrooms, cruise, public parks, restrooms</td>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>Gay, Bi, And Straight</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence: UNM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity: White</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to Join: Live at fraternities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Likes: Social acceptance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dislikes:</td>
<td>Sexually dissatisfied, no real community</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Comments:</td>
<td>Don't consider themselves gay</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Meeting Spot</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gym Bunnies</td>
<td>Defined Fitness Gym, Pride Gym, and Knob Hill Gym</td>
<td>20's-40's</td>
<td>Gay, Bi, And Straight</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Join a gym</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: See and be seen, good bodies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>Gay Chamber of Commerce meetings</td>
<td>Upper 20's+</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>M, F</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Residence: Heights, Knob Hill</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ethnicity: White</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Join Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Business networks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes: Lack of real community, competitive, self-absorbed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Couples</td>
<td>Double Rainbow Ice Cream Store, Martini Grill, &amp; Gym</td>
<td>21+</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>Residence: All Over</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Find a guy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Wardrobe, sex, companionship, love</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes: Can be reclusive, lack of community, few other couples</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments: Relationships rarely last long</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gay Men's Chorus R</td>
<td>rehearsals, performances</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Residence: All Over</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Audition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Shared interests, performing, singing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Under 21</td>
<td>Common Bond Gay Community Center Group, Rap</td>
<td>&lt;21</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>M, F</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Attend meetings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes: Awkward, lack of attendance, not welcoming</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments: Not many participants</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Rodeo</td>
<td>County fairgrounds, Ranch</td>
<td>Upper 20's+</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>M, F</td>
</tr>
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<td>Residence: All Over</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Approx Size: Very Small</td>
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<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Volunteer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Fun, meet like people</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes: Expensive to travel to rodeos all over</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments</td>
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## Community Assessment Results
from Albuquerque, NM (cont'd)

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<th>Group</th>
<th>Meeting Spot</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leather Men</td>
<td>Meeting Spot: Ranch</td>
<td>20’s+</td>
<td>Gay</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Approx Size: Small</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender: M</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Be into leather scene</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Shared interests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Meeting Spot: UNM, TVI, High Schools</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>Gay, Bi, And Straight</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Gender: M, F</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Student</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Campus Life, atmosphere, classes, peers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes: Bashing, closet cases, bullies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hair Salons</td>
<td>Meeting Spot: La Run Ni Hate Perms Plus, Artistic Creations</td>
<td>20’s-30’s</td>
<td>Gay</td>
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<td>Residence: All Over</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Work at salon</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Meet lots of people, good money</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes: Impossible customers</td>
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<td>Misc. Comments:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Meeting Spot: Dignity (Gay Catholics Group), Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Gay, Bi, Straight</td>
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<td>Residence: All Over</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join: Join congregation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Community, shared spirituality, belief in God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes: Older crowd</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. Comments:</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artsy</td>
<td>Meeting Spot: Theaters, galleries, coffee houses</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Gay, Bi, And Straight</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Residence: All Over</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Gender: M, F</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnicity: Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Join:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes: Art, culture, see and be seen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dislikes: Snobby, theater can be expensive</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Implementing Agency

Objectives

To familiarize you with the responsibilities and functions of the implementing agency, including:

- the different types of agencies that host Mpowerment Projects;
- suggested guidelines for leadership;
- planning for the Mpowerment Project before implementation;
- funding issues;
- agency policies, attitudes, and environment;
- staff selection and training, including sample job descriptions and interview questions;
- project supervision; and
- creating and maintaining good community relations.

What you'll find in the Appendix to this module:

- Figure 3.1.a  Sample job announcement (a short succinct announcement)
- Figure 3.1.b  A more detailed job announcement
- Figure 3.1.c  Job announcement for the Outreach Coordinator position
- Figure 3.1.d  Job announcement for the Small Groups Coordinator position
- Figure 3.2  Sample interview questions for prospective coordinators
- Figure 3.3  Sample Coordinator application
- Figure 3.4  Mpowerment Project suggested annual expenses
The Mpowerment Project operates successfully when the implementing agency creates an environment where the Project Coordinators, Core Group, Project volunteers, and optional Community Advisory Board can flourish. The Implementing Agency is usually a community-based organization such as an AIDS service organization or a lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) community center whose mission includes providing HIV-prevention services to gay/bisexual men. Additionally, universities or health departments may implement the Mpowerment Project themselves or provide funding to a local organization to run it.

It is the implementing agency’s responsibility to provide effective leadership for all aspects of the Project. The agency is responsible for all planning prior to Project startup, including creating the structure for the Project, obtaining sufficient resources for effective implementation, and considering whether any agency policies may need to be modified to accommodate this innovative program; hiring and supervising well-qualified, capable staff who are a good match for this intervention; and monitoring and evaluating the Project.
What agencies can host an Mpowerment Project?

In our research of Mpowerment Projects across the country, we noted that several different types of organizations have successfully served as host agencies. HIV/AIDS-related community-based organizations (CBOs) were by far the most common groups to host the Mpowerment Project. However, other host agencies included local public health departments, CBOs not focused on HIV/AIDS, as well as funders themselves. Whatever type of agency implements the Mpowerment Project, there are a number of major issues to consider when deciding to implement the program, as described in this manual.
“Sometimes you ask yourself if this is effective and if it really works or if it is something that is supposed to work, but when you see guys talking about how you are at risk even if you are a top or a bottom... to see how they are empowering themselves about safer sex, or sometimes abstinence even...that’s when I think that it is worth it.”

* FROM A COORDINATOR

“There is a lot of support for this from the agency...the ED loves this Project, and he has very strong feelings about prevention.”

* FROM A COORDINATOR

“The agency really buys into the fact that the Core Group is the decision making body for the Project, and they try to honor the desires of the Core... they usually make really good decisions”

* FROM A PROJECT SUPERVISOR

“This program is really important to the agency... it models a kind of prevention and community organizing that the agency has been wanting to do for a long time...and it is a community level model, which is really important to the agency...it is central to the goals of the agency...so it fits in really well.”

* FROM A PROJECT SUPERVISOR
Providing leadership

The following guidelines can help agencies provide effective leadership for the Mpowerment Project:

1. Make HIV prevention among a diverse population of young gay/bisexual men a priority. Articulate this goal in the agency’s annual plans and long-range planning, and formulate plans for implementing the Mpowerment Project in advance.

2. Commit to finding the right people for the Mpowerment Project Coordinator positions. The Coordinators are critical to the success of the Project.

3. Acknowledge the importance of the Core Group by creating a role for it in the agency’s decision-making processes. There are a number of ways to ensure this occurs. For example, Core Group members could be invited to meet with the agency’s board or directors, or could participate on a board subcommittee. At a minimum, the Project Supervisor could ensure that reports from the Core Group are heard at the highest level of decision-making within the agency.

4. Shortly after hiring Project Coordinators, agencies should have them conduct an assessment to understand and be up-to-date about the young men’s scene and the diversity within the local young gay/ bisexual male community in order to gain perspectives from diverse young gay/bisexual men about issues relevant to the intervention. Detailed information on conducting a community assessment is provided in Module 2.

5. Discuss implementation of the Mpowerment Project with other CBO staff. The Mpowerment Project website has some materials that may be helpful to share with staff so they understand the goals and objectives of the new program. Elicit input from the rest of the CBO
build on the agency’s strengths

staff about how the agency’s various programs can work collaboratively with the Mpowerment Project, building on the agency’s strengths and experiences.

6 Ensure that staff who have been hired to run and supervise the Mpowerment Project obtain adequate training in how to implement the program, and thoroughly review materials such as the training manual. Maintain good communication lines with Project staff so they feel comfortable in requesting assistance when they need it, both from agency staff and from the Mpowerment Project’s technical assistance team.

7 Where needed, introduce new evaluation methods for staff to use in analyzing Project performance. This may entail training staff and demonstrating how to apply information gathered during the community assessment. For example, if your community assessment showed that many different groups of young gay/bisexual men exist in your community, yet only one or two groups routinely show up at Project sponsored Social Outreach Events, programmatic changes are likely needed to attract new groups of men to the Project. This requires evaluating every Social Outreach Event for the diversity of men who attend it.

8 Continually investigate funding possibilities and submit grant applications. It is the responsibility of the agency to generate funding for the Project. (The young gay/bisexual men who serve as volunteers in the Project are unlikely to have much expertise in this area.)
Pre-implementation planning

The desire to implement the Mpowerment Project may have been sparked by hearing about the Project at a professional conference; reading about it in articles, on websites, or in CDC and other publications; seeing it in action in another community; or hearing others talk about it. Regardless, once the decision has been made to start an Mpowerment Project, the implementing agency must next consider three key needs: funding, personnel, and space.

Before implementing a Project, we cannot emphasize enough the importance of thinking through the following: 1) how to obtain adequate funding for the Project; 2) what qualifications and characteristics are needed in the people who will be hired to run it; and 3) what options exist in the community for a distinct Project space.

Our research has shown that organizations that strategize and plan ahead are much more effective at implementing the Mpowerment Project than organizations that do not.

Securing adequate funding

Implementing the Mpowerment Project requires substantially more resources than educational programs that deliver AIDS 101 talks, street outreach, or brochure distribution. If you plan to implement the Mpowerment Project, you need to have funding for at least one full time Coordinator, but it is better to have at least another half-time Coordinator (and our research shows that two full-time staff is by far preferable). And importantly, when we talk about time spent on the Mpowerment Project, it does not include time working on HIV testing and counseling. In addition, it is important to find a space to house the Project. Without a sufficient budget to support the expenses of staff and Project space, it will be difficult to implement the Mpowerment Project very effectively (See Figure 3.4 in the Appendix to this module for sample Mpowerment Project expenses).

The Project’s goals are to reduce sexual risk behavior and increase knowledge of current HIV serostatus among young gay/bisexual men by developing a strong, healthy, empowered community of men who support each other in reducing their sexual risk behavior, in getting HIV testing, and in functioning successfully in the larger society where heterosexuality is the norm. With respect to implementing the Mpowerment Project, the agency’s objectives include recruiting, hiring, and supervising staff; securing and maintaining an adequate Project space; coordinating the Core Group; sponsoring effective Social Outreach activities; and diffusing norms of safer sex and testing throughout the entire young gay/bisexual men’s community. Considering the scope of Project objectives and activities, it should be clear why at least one full-time staff member is a necessity, and why two full-time staff members are preferable to implement the intervention successfully.
An agency needs to be creative and resourceful in generating adequate funding for the Project. Many, if not most, HIV Prevention Planning Councils have identified young gay/bisexual men as a high priority for prevention services. The Mpowerment Project is listed in the CDC’s *Compendium of HIV Prevention Interventions with Evidence of Effectiveness*, which includes programs shown to be effective through rigorous scientific evaluation. The Mpowerment Project is the only HIV prevention intervention that has been tested through rigorous research methods and has been shown to be effective in reducing unsafe sex among young gay/bisexual men. The CDC, which funds many HIV prevention efforts, strongly urges the implementation of programs that have been shown to be effective through research. Thus, referring to the Compendium will add considerable strength to any grant proposals you write. For the same reason, it makes sense to apply for funding to health departments, which are likely to be receptive to any program that research says works. Some local or national foundations may also be interested in funding part of or the entire Project. In addition, it may also be worthwhile to investigate other sources of funding for parts of the
intervention, such as community foundation grants, local hospitals', or other local funding mechanisms. In addition, organizations sometimes obtain partial funding from their state health department, and supplement it (for example, for space) from a community grantor or through other fund-raising efforts.

It may not always be necessary to seek new funding sources if agencies are able and willing to reallocate existing funds by modifying current programming. Since the Mpowerment Project may meet the requirements of existing grants, contracts, or program objectives, if the organization already has funding for MSM or gay/bisexual men’s programming, it may be worthwhile to discuss this possibility with the funder.

**Staffing**

The implementing agency is responsible for advertising the Project Coordinator positions, and for hiring, training, and supervising these staff members. More than anything else, the success of the Mpowerment Project depends on recruiting and retaining talented and committed young men to coordinate the Project. Through our work with organizations implementing the Mpowerment Project, we have found that this may be the single most important ingredient that leads to success. Consequently, it is essential that the implementing agency invest sufficient time and energy into locating the right staff. Project Coordinators must be outgoing, sociable, comfortable talking to strangers and groups, and passionate about this new way of delivering HIV prevention to young gay/bisexual men. The Coordinators need to be very knowledgeable about the young MSM community, such as what are major segments of the young men’s community, where they hang out and their culture, and this is best achieved by being part of some young gay/bisexual men’s social networks.

Given the staff’s central importance in the Mpowerment Project, it is important that an agency not simply hire people who are already on staff to fill Coordinator positions without carefully considering if they are well qualified for this role. Our research has shown that these positions usually require individuals who are currently from and quite socially active within the MSM community. The characteristics listed above may or may not fit the description of staff who are already at an organization. If they do not have these qualities, a thorough search for suitable staff is imperative. More information about Coordinators’ roles and responsibilities can be found later in this module, as well as in *Module 4: Coordinators*.

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1 In one community, a local hospital became a generous supporter of the Mpowerment Project because of the model’s cost-effectiveness and ability to avert a significant number of new HIV infections, thus reducing future health-care costs.
Agency policies, attitudes, and environment

The implementing agency must be comfortable with three very basic concepts that are integral to the success of any Mpowerment Project. First, the agency must be comfortable letting the Core Group make decisions for the Project. This is an integral part of the program, since empowering the young gay/bisexual men’s community is central to the program’s purpose. Second, the implementing agency must be comfortable working with young gay/bisexual men. Although this may sound obvious, in our research we have observed situations where the implementing agency behaved judgmentally towards young gay/bisexual men, and developed policies and procedures that reflected their discomfort. Third, self-defeating attitudes and beliefs held by staff at implementing agencies about HIV prevention with young gay/bisexual men, or about the Mpowerment Project itself is a major barrier to running a successful Mpowerment Project. We have worked with many agencies who feel that young gay/bisexual men will never change their behavior, that the community is too apathetic to get involved, or that a community-mobilization approach to prevention will never succeed. We acknowledge that HIV prevention can be difficult and frustrating work, but negative beliefs make the work even harder, and they often become self-fulfilling prophecies by dooming a Project before it ever starts.

It may be necessary to change some agency policies in order to implement the Mpowerment Project effectively. As a prime example, agency management must understand that because much of the work of running the Mpowerment Project takes place outside of regular business hours, the Coordinators cannot work regular “nine-to-five” jobs. In order to reach clients, a large portion of the work needs to be done in the evenings and on weekends. For this reason, management must be prepared to defend the need for Mpowerment Project staff to work these hours, should other agency staff question the absence of Coordinators during regular business hours. Many agencies have actually changed work-hour policies, as well as other policies that may hamper the ability for the Mpowerment Project to be implemented effectively.
Project space

It is best to decide where the Mpowerment Project will be housed as early as possible in the planning process. Ideally, the space that is selected can suitably host a variety of Project activities, from small group gatherings to larger social events. If the chosen space is shared with others, it is important that the Mpowerment Project have sole use of the space on a frequent and recurring basis. Further, if a shared space cannot be customized to reflect the gay positive/sex positive nature of the Project, a different space should be found. During our research, we learned of Mpowerment Projects that shared space with other programs that balked at openly displaying posters, invitations, and other HIV prevention materials targeting gay/bisexual men. Since it is imperative to have such materials out and freely available to Project participants, these spaces did not work well. The issue of Project Space is discussed in greater detail in Module 6: Project Space.
At the time an agency decides to implement the Mpowerment Project, it may also make sense to review existing programs and modify them, if necessary, so they work together in a complementary way. For example, if an agency already operates a program for gay/bisexual men, it may want to change the program’s focus so that it primarily serves men the Mpowerment Project is not likely to reach, such as older men, or men who do not identify as being gay/bisexual.

Training new staff

All staff new to the intervention will need to be trained. First they will need to learn about the model used in the Mpowerment Project, and then learn how to implement it. New Project Coordinators should be expected to complete all of the following:

- read the Mpowerment Project Manual and the M-group Manual
- become conversant with the Mpowerment Project website (www.mpowerment.org)
- watch the audio slide shows on the website
- attend the three-day training on how to conduct the Mpowerment Project
- attend an “HIV prevention 101” training provided by the agency or some other local organization
- obtain training on how to facilitate groups
- watch the M-group video and practice running M-groups with Core Group or other volunteers
- read websites daily or weekly about HIV/AIDS (e.g., the Kaiser Family Foundation at www.kff.org/hivaids/index.cfm which offers information on HIV/AIDS with a national and a global perspective, or the United States Center for Disease Control’s National Prevention Information Network at www.cdcnpin.org which lists recent news, activities or publications about HIV/AIDS prevention, including links to sources for funding, conferences, and materials.
- sign up for at least one daily or weekly list-serve about HIV/AIDS. The Kaiser Family Foundation offers email subscriptions to news and events at http://www.kff.org/profile/subscriptions.cfm. An excellent list serve of recent scholarly articles about HIV/AIDS can be joined by emailing Robert Mallow of Florida International University at rmalow@bellsouth.net.
The importance of providing Project Coordinators with adequate training before implementing the Project cannot be overemphasized. In our research, we found that when Coordinators did not know what the Project’s Core Elements were or how the Guiding Principles related to the core elements, the Project was not implemented very successfully. Reading and watching all of the training materials and participating in the three-day training is essential for new Project Coordinators, even if they have been a Core Group member or volunteer. Doing so provides them with a “big picture” view of the program that is needed to be an effective Coordinator.

Additionally, our research has shown that staff turnover is common among Mpowerment Projects. Fully 35% of the CBOs experienced turnover of Coordinators in the first six months. In the first year, 56% experienced turnover, with 23% of those agencies experiencing staff turnover multiple times. While turnover is not necessarily a bad thing (implementation success dramatically improves when ineffectual staff leave), turnover does mean that there will be new staff needing to be trained. Provided agencies have already anticipated this need in planning their original budget, this should not be a problem. However, it also calls attention to the importance of finding the right staff to begin with and thus avoiding having to retrain new employees.
“The Supervisor meets with us regularly
to talk about the goals for the week...he keeps a low
profile...he doesn’t want guys to think that he’s checking
up on them...but at the same time, he gives a great deal
of support...he has a pretty good idea of when he
needs to step in... the next day after an event,
we deconstruct it and try to come up with
ways that it could be improved.”

* FROM A COORDINATOR

**Project supervision**

The individual at the implementing agency who directs HIV prevention or gay/bisexual men’s programs is likely to be the Project Supervisor, and therefore will supervise the Mpowerment Project Coordinators. It is extremely important that the Project Supervisor be familiar enough with the Project’s goals, approaches, and methods to know when core elements are not being implemented, or to know when they are not being implemented with fidelity to the original design. For instance, if the Project Supervisor does not know what an M-group is, how often they are being held, or how many men are attending, he or she will have a difficult time determining whether to encourage the Coordinators to conduct more of them, or whether to sit down together and problem solve ways of increasing their effectiveness.

The amount of supervision that Coordinators need will vary substantially according to their previous experience. Many young gay/bisexual men have had few formal work opportunities, have rarely supervised or worked with volunteers, and may not have done administrative work. Others may have had considerable experience in these areas. Therefore, Coordinator supervision must be adjusted accordingly. However, even staff experienced in HIV prevention may benefit from the support obtained through regular supervision.

**Group and individual supervision**

The need to train and supervise the Project Coordinators is an ongoing concern. Since the Coordinator job is multifaceted, its demands are great, and most Coordinators are relatively inexperienced with having this much responsibility, close supervision by the agency is important. In particular, supervision needs are substantial when the Project is just starting. During this period, the Project Supervisor can hold both individual meetings and weekly group meetings with the Coordinators to review collectively how the Project is going and to problem solve together.
“We have a lot of meetings...
two a week...one individually and one as a staff. The next day after an event, we deconstruct it and try to come up with ways that it could be improved.”

* FROM A PROJECT SUPERVISOR

Since many of the Coordinator duties are interdependent, meeting as a group helps the Coordinators to identify gaps in activities. These group meetings allow the Project Supervisor to create a process whereby not only the Project Supervisor, but also the Coordinators review and provide feedback on each other’s job performance and goals. Over time, the Project Supervisor may not need to attend these meetings every week, but the Project Coordinators can continue to meet weekly to support each other, to review progress on various items, and to coordinate their activities.

Following the weekly team meetings, we have found it helpful for the Project Supervisor to hold individual meetings with each Project Coordinator, particularly at the start of the Project or when the Coordinators are new. The purpose of these meetings is to make certain that each Coordinator knows exactly what is expected of him, and to provide whatever individualized support is needed for him to accomplish his tasks.

As the Coordinators grow in experience through running M-groups, implementing Social Outreach Events, and working with the Core Group and their volunteer teams, their need for supervision will decline substantially. At this point—usually after about four months time—individual and group meetings can be reduced from every week to every two to three weeks. Yet, as discussed above, we recommend that the Project Coordinators continue to meet weekly with each other to ensure that all tasks are being conducted and are coordinated with each other.

New Coordinators who are hired after the Project has been running for some time generally will require less supervision than Coordinators who help to start the Project. This is because once a program is in place, new Coordinators will encounter an existing culture that supports its day-to-day operation. The other Coordinators can help the new Coordinator learn what tasks need to be done.
It is important to set clear, measurable objectives for the Project, such as the number of M-groups or the number of medium-sized Social Outreach Events to conduct in a certain amount of time. These Project objectives should be very specific and achievable given Project resources (such as staffing and funding). The Project Coordinators and the Project Supervisor may decide upon these objectives jointly as they consider the capacity of the staff and the funding to enact these objectives. Often the objectives may be specified by the nature of the funding (e.g., sometimes a Project is funded to produce a certain number of “deliverables” or units of service).

Examining the progress towards achieving objectives is a key part of process evaluation (described in Module 12: Evaluation) and is generally the focus of supervision. Process evaluation involves examining the process of implementing the intervention, and may include keeping track of how many activities are conducted or how many young men are being reached. Conducting process evaluation is an essential way for the Project Coordinators and the Project Supervisor to have a “yardstick” by which to assess the performance of the Project.

“Anytime we have had an event we sit down for an hour to an hour and a half and talk about what went on...what the challenges were, the barriers were...what the successes were...and by doing that, a lot of times we become aware of things that we weren’t aware of.”

* FROM A PROJECT SUPERVISOR
Use of behavioral objectives

“Behavioral Objectives” are objectives that the Project Coordinators are striving to accomplish. The term “behavioral” is used specifically so that it focuses on tasks that need to be done. In preparation for supervision meetings, each Project Coordinator writes up their behavioral objectives for the coming weeks. (See Figure 4.1 in the Appendix to Module 4: Coordinators for some samples of behavioral objectives from the Mpowerment Project based in Austin, TX.) The behavioral objectives are then discussed and refined during the supervision meeting. Following the meeting, the Project Coordinators then rewrite their behavioral objectives, if necessary, and give a copy to the Project Supervisor for review. As a tool for self-monitoring of their performance, the use of behavioral objectives is empowering since it provides a reference point against which the Project Coordinators can measure their progress in achieving the objectives they have set for themselves.

Behavioral objectives are related to the Project objectives, but they are not identical. For example, the Project objectives include such items as “hold four M-groups in 3 months.” In contrast, behavioral objectives would be “recruit 10 men for next week’s M-group.” The behavioral objectives then detail exactly what work the Coordinator needs to conduct in order to reach the objective. Combined, the behavioral objectives are the small steps that must be taken in order to achieve the Project objectives.
One of the most important aspects of the Coordinators’ role is to reflect on the extent to which the Project is effectively setting in motion the desired processes (e.g., is it reaching new groups of young men, are young men talking with each other about safer sex, are they taking over ownership of the Project), and to frequently analyze their own role in the Project (e.g., Am I facilitating the empowerment of young men? Am I acting as a role model for informal outreach to the community? Am I describing the Project as a fun and social community-building program or as an HIV prevention Project?). Therefore, the most important thing the Project Supervisor can do is to help the Coordinators learn how to make this reflection and analysis process an automatic and ongoing part of their job.

The most effective way to accomplish this is by modeling the process for the Coordinators, that is, by being reflective and analytic about the Project. This approach to supervision comes out of the literature on empowerment; when people analyze their own problems and then come up with solutions themselves, this facilitates an empowerment process. It is intended that the Coordinators then do this in turn with the Core Group and volunteers. This process of empowerment goes back to the Guiding Principles of the Project.

How supervision is conducted can facilitate or hinder the extent to which Coordinators are reflective. An overly directive style on the part of the Project Supervisor is unlikely to facilitate such reflection and self-analysis. We suggest the use of questioning as an effective supervision tool to facilitate the Coordinators’ self-reflection. For example, the Project Supervisor may be concerned that Coordinators are not focusing enough on doing activities that are necessary in order to reach a Project objective. In such a case, it can be helpful to ask questions about what behavioral objectives have been identified by the Coordinator and how they will help to reach
Project objectives. As another example, the Project Supervisor may pose questions about the extent to which young men from diverse segments of the community are being reached through the various outreach activities, in order to facilitate the Coordinators’ consideration of these issues. When difficulties arise, it is beneficial to brainstorm solutions with the Coordinators, since this further stimulates the reflective-analytical process.

**The Project Supervisor and Core Group**

The Project Supervisor can play a critical advisory role to the Core Group, especially during its first few months. During the meetings, the Project Supervisor can model ways of getting the group to reflect and work together cooperatively. The Project Supervisor’s presence also supports the Coordinators, who are usually less experienced at group facilitation. It is highly recommended that Project Supervisors attend all meetings for the first month, and then every other meeting for an additional two or three months. After this, attendance once every few months usually works well.

**Coordination of other Core Elements**

The Mpowerment Project has many interrelated and interdependent Core Elements, in addition to the Core Group. One of the challenges facing Coordinators is learning to coordinate them effectively. The Project Supervisor can help by continually focusing attention on: 1) the degree to which coordination is occurring among components; 2) the degree to which the Project Coordinators are coordinating their activities with each other; and 3) whether all details are being considered.

Suppose, for example, that the Coordinators have planned a large Social Outreach Event that will entail a lot of details: finding space, ordering refreshments, planning decorations, arranging for music, preparing media publicity, conducting outreach publicity at bars and community events, doing outreach at the actual event, preparing an HIV prevention outreach performance or interactive activity, gathering materials for distribution at the event, and collecting names of men attending the event so that they can be recruited for M-groups. It is helpful for the Project Supervisor to ask questions that will cause the Coordinators to reflect if they have remembered all of the necessary components. For example, how will HIV prevention be encouraged during the event? Who will collect names and contact information of every young man attending the event? How will young men in the community find out about the event?
Incorporating attention to the Guiding Principles into supervision

The Project Supervisor can also play a strategic role in ensuring that all Project materials and activities reflect the guiding principles underlying the Project (discussed in Module 1 and listed in the table below). Periodically it is helpful for the Project Supervisor to ask the Project Coordinators how the Guiding Principles are being followed when implementing the different components of the intervention. For example, as Coordinators are discussing the Core Group, it is helpful for the Project Supervisor to ask questions about how decisions are being made in a manner that empowers the Core Group members. Diffusion of messages is another Guiding Principle. Project Supervisors can help ensure that diffusion is occurring by periodically reviewing the concept of informal outreach with the Coordinators, pointing out how opportunities for it exist in virtually every interaction between Core Group members and young gay/bisexual men in the community, and that through these interactions, messages will be diffused through the community.
Guiding Principles

- Social focus
- Empowerment philosophy
- Peer influence of safer sex messages
- Multi-level approach
- Gay-positive/sex-positive
- Community-building
- Diffusion of innovations
In addition to referring to the Guiding Principles, it is helpful if the Project Supervisor can review most of the outreach materials that are developed during the first few months, keeping in mind that these materials should be positive and uplifting in tone, eye-catching, and address underlying reasons as to why young men are at risk for HIV (rather than just providing safer sex guidelines). This will help ensure that Coordinators are keeping key aspects of the Project in mind and not reverting to older, less effective methods.

When any of the following things occur, it should serve as a warning to both the Project Supervisor and Coordinators that—consciously or not—they have abandoned the Guiding Principles of the Project. (This is not an exhaustive list of things to look for.)

- The Project begins to use fear appeals in HIV-prevention messages.
- Project activities or materials stop being fun or uplifting.
- The HIV-prevention aspect of Social Outreach Events gets lost.
- New young men stop coming to the Project.
- Important decisions are all being made by the Coordinators.
Encouraging revision and renewal

The Mpowerment Project is designed to be a program that continually evolves as participants come and go and as the needs and desires of young men in the community change. The Mpowerment Project needs to be constantly renewed to attract and retain the young men it seeks to engage. The agency can play a key role here by encouraging the Project Coordinators and Core Group to continually reflect on the status of Project activities, working with them to identify areas that need improvement, and helping them to revise activities as needed. Based on our implementation research, four areas in particular require agency monitoring.

**Avoid cliques**

Occasionally the Core Group becomes a clique. For example, the Core Group may plan small activities that its members enjoy and attend, but it makes little effort to publicize the event so that new young men are actively sought and welcomed. While Core Group activities can be valuable in creating morale among its members, another goal of each event is to bring in new men to the Project through active outreach. The main rationale for having Social Outreach Events is to attract as many and as diverse a group of young gay/bisexual men as possible. Another issue that has sometimes arisen is that Core Group members greet each other, but do not welcome men who are coming to the Core Group meeting for the first time. This is alienating to newcomers and in the past has resulted in young men never returning to the Project. Therefore all men attending the Core Group should be greeted and introduced to other Core Group members. In fact, some Projects have decided that it is important to identify certain Core Group members as the “greeters” of all new people, so that they feel welcomed and do not feel like they are trying to break into a clique.

Often we have found that a clique does not exist, but it is perceived to be in existence to newcomers. Core Group members and volunteers will know each other and will all greet each other or spend time with each other. Indeed, this is one of the goals of the Project, to create new friendships and supportive, caring social networks. But newcomers may not know anyone and may feel isolated at a large event, especially while observing others being friendly with each other. If newcomers are not greeted and introduced to others, they may feel that the Project is an exclusive clique. Therefore, Projects have often decided to have greeters of newcomers at all events, whether the events are Core Group meetings, small Social Outreach activities, or large Social Outreach activities.

Everyone likes to feel welcomed and to meet some new men. Encourage Coordinators to go out of their way to make new members feel welcomed. The Project is for all the young gay/bisexual men in the community...not just a select few.
In a desire to throw impressive Social Outreach Events, activity organizers may sometimes overlook designing an HIV-prevention component for the event. When events are still in the planning stages, the Project Supervisor should double check to make certain each contains one or more HIV-prevention components (discussed in greater detail in Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team). In addition, names of attendees and their contact information should be collected in order to help with recruitment to M-groups.

Similarly, sometimes activity organizers get so involved in throwing an event that they forget the need to conduct widespread publicity of the upcoming event with enough advance notice so that people will hear about it and plan to attend. Hence, the agency Project Supervisor should check to be sure that publicity is being planned and conducted in a timely way.

Since the Mpowerment Project includes multiple components, it is important that the agency monitor each one. Sometimes Core Groups spend a disproportionate amount of time planning Social Outreach Events. Occasionally too much time goes into planning activities that repeatedly attract the same men, or the Project rarely, if ever, conduct events that attract different, important segments of the community. This can be avoided if the Project Supervisor works with the Coordinators to set six-month goals for the types and number of Project activities to be carried out, and then carefully monitors that the goals are reached.

Candidates for the Coordinator positions must possess a high degree of maturity, regardless of their chronological age.
Selecting Coordinators

The success of the Project is dependent upon the Coordinators’ skills and commitment both to HIV prevention and to using the methods of the Project. Therefore, the advertisement of the Coordinator positions and the selection of Coordinators should be done very carefully (See Figure 3.3 in the Appendix to this module for a sample job application).

Desirable skills and characteristics

Coordinators fulfill three main functions. They coordinate Project activities, initiate the diffusion process for safer sex, and strive to have the Project serve an empowering function in young gay/bisexual men’s lives as they take control and make decisions about the Project. In addition to these roles, Coordinators must frequently reflect upon the functioning of the Project to assess if it is operating effectively. They must also engage in self-critical analysis in order to observe their own working style and their relationships with others. Coordinators are expected to make adjustments to the Project and to their working styles as needed.

It is essential to find Coordinators with the skills, talents, and characteristics needed to carry out these functions. (See Figure 3.2 in the Appendix to this module for a sample list of interview questions.) Individuals who require a step-by-step cookbook approach to guide them in performing their jobs are unlikely to be able to perform these complicated roles effectively. Candidates for the Coordinator positions must possess a high degree of maturity, regardless of their chronological age. They should be confident enough in themselves to be able to be constantly reflective. The most effective Coordinators show that they have a strong personal commitment to HIV/AIDS prevention or to gay community issues, as demonstrated through their work and/or volunteer history. Since Coordinators are expected to conduct informal outreach through their own friendship networks, this requires a strong personal commitment to the goals of the Project.

Coordinators need to work effectively with volunteers, since volunteers are critical for the success of the Project. Coordinators who demonstrate the skills necessary to motivate volunteers, facilitate their ability to work well, and can empower them to take on greater and greater responsibility are likely to be a great asset to the Project.

Coordinators need to possess leadership skills, and must be extremely responsible, organized individuals in order to oversee the broad range of activities undertaken by the Mpowerment Project including M-groups, outreach events, outreach at bars and community events, publicity, administration, and ongoing evaluation. Yet simultaneously, the Coordinators must strive to ensure that achieving these outcomes is an empowering process for those involved. The Coordinators must feel comfortable working with a nonhierarchical group and sharing with others authority for developing plans and making decisions. (For additional information, see Module 5: Core Group.)
Depending on their assigned areas of responsibility, particular skills may be required of Coordinators. For example, Coordinators responsible for the M-groups will need to be skilled at facilitating discussions and drawing out more reticent people into discussions. Similarly, the Outreach Coordinator will need to possess some theatrical abilities, must not be intimidated by crowds, and be able to encourage Outreach Team members to be equally outgoing. It is helpful for at least one Coordinator to possess good computer skills, since these are necessary to maintain the Project’s database and assist the materials team in designing outreach materials.

**Advertising the positions**

Advertising for the Coordinator positions serves two functions. It helps the Project find good candidates for the job, and it also begins publicizing the Project in the community. This is likely to be the first time that most young gay/bisexual men will learn of the existence of the upcoming Project. Hence, it is important for the job advertisements to consider both functions. Since previous research has shown that a program that focuses solely on HIV prevention is unlikely to attract many young gay/bisexual men, it is best for all advertising to focus on social needs and community-building, as well as on HIV prevention (See Figures 3.1.a - 3.1.d in the Appendix to this module for sample job announcements).
In the past, implementing agencies have placed advertisements in the gay press, in university newspapers, and in alternative newspapers that were progressive but not predominately gay. If publications exist that expressly target people of color—and particularly those that reach young gay/bisexual men of color—advertisements should be placed there as well. We urge that advertisements not be placed primarily in newspapers for nonprofit organizations, since relatively few young gay/bisexual men read these, particularly those young men who are not already working in HIV prevention.

In addition to media publicity, we also suggest that Project organizers send job announcements suitable for posting to all relevant organizations. Relevant organizations include agencies that provide services to people with AIDS, people of color, and gay/bisexual men and lesbians, and also LGBTQ student organizations, health departments, and university-based gay studies departments. The specific list of appropriate organizations will be different in every community.

Creating and maintaining good community relations

Creating a community environment that supports the Mpowerment Project is one key to the Project’s success. Therefore, it is extremely beneficial for the implementing agency to work on developing such a climate. Although the primary audience for the intervention is young gay/bisexual men, others in the community can facilitate or hinder the implementation of the Project. An effective community relations program takes into account these other groups and constituencies. Groups within the community that might be considered include:

- **Individuals who are not in the Mpowerment Project’s target population** (e.g., older gay men, lesbians, women, youth). If the Project is not presented sensitively to them, these constituencies may resent the fact that the Project excludes them and consider it ageist, sexist, or divisive. Such misperceptions can be a very destructive force in implementing the Project. Inviting community leaders from these groups to serve on the Community Advisory Board can be extremely helpful.

- **Other HIV/AIDS service organizations that also serve gay/bisexual men.** It is important to avoid feelings of competition or turf battles between the Mpowerment Project and other HIV/AIDS organizations. Ideally, the Mpowerment Project and other organizations can complement each other’s services so that the work of each is enhanced. Some ways to accomplish this include providing referrals, asking some other agencies’ staff to be on the Community Advisory Board, and keeping in periodic contact.

- **Conservative factions within the community.** There are likely to be people within the community who do not support the Mpowerment Project’s mission of building a strong young gay/bisexual men’s community. Their objections may spring
from homophobia or religious beliefs. Some may be parents concerned that their children may be “exposed” to homosexuality, or citizens who object to their tax dollars being spent to support outreach events for gay/bisexual men. Since these people are unlikely to change their views, the Mpowerment Project’s strategy has been to maintain a low profile so that these types of individuals remain unaware of the Project (See Module 10: Publicity). Even so, the agency should still identify groups in the community who are likely to object to the Project, consider the issues they might raise, and be prepared in case they respond negatively to the Project.

On a broader scale, it may sometimes be necessary to attempt to modify a public policy that impacts programs for gay/bisexual men. While it may not be within the scope of every implementing agency to do so, agency participation in the local HIV Prevention Planning Council, on community boards and foundations, and in college and university programs may make a substantive difference in community acceptance of, or opposition to, the Mpowerment Project.

Carrying out the following tasks may help your Project build strong and supportive community relations:

- **Build support for the Mpowerment Project** with the implementing agency’s Board of Directors by fully describing the Project to them, addressing their questions and concerns, and keeping them informed of the Project’s progress as appropriate. The Coordinators and other Project participants must feel supported by agency management when they have to cope with opposition from other individuals.

- **Inform other community stakeholders** that the Project is being launched. These may include HIV Prevention Planning Councils, departments of public health, other community-based organizations, bar owners, schools, and any other organizations or individuals you can think of within your community who might help the Project. Periodically keeping them informed of the progress of the Project is also highly recommended.

- **Identify potential opposition and prepare** a process for responding to it, including guidelines for when not to respond.

- **Set up a method for keeping agency staff informed** about the goals and methods of the Project and the progress that has been made in implementing it. We have sometimes found that staff in client services departments who do not understand the Project’s goals and methods misunderstand the Project’s activities and become resentful.
Sample Job Announcement
(a short succinct announcement)

2 Positions Available

Small Group Coordinator
Outreach Coordinator

We are looking for 2 energetic, committed individuals for a new, creative, fun, empowering, and peer-run HIV prevention/community-building program designed for young gay and bisexual men ages 18-29 in (name of city).

2 Full Time Positions Available.

Small Group Coordinator: Provide leadership for the Project team, facilitate skills-building workshops, help conduct community-strengthening events, and be involved with community outreach. Recruit participants and facilitate small discussion groups for young gay and bisexual men.

Outreach Coordinator: Recruit volunteers to help design & coordinate fun, creative events to educate and encourage young gay and bisexual men about safer sex. Recruit participants and facilitate small discussion groups for young gay & bisexual men.

For more details about each position, please see the additional Coordinator ads listed on craigslist.

For more information and applications, call (555) 555-5555 or email the link above.

Download this form as a Word document at www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure3-1-a.doc
Sample Job Announcement
(a more detailed job announcement)

2 Positions Available

Small Group Coordinator
Outreach Coordinator

HIV Prevention/Community-building Program for Young Gay and Bisexual Men

Energetic, committed individuals are needed to implement a newly developing HIV prevention and community-building program for young gay and bisexual men between the ages of 18 and 29. The community-based, peer-run prevention program is an innovative and evolving program that includes a combination of peer-led small group safer sex workshops and peer outreach. The essence of the program is community organizing, mobilization and empowerment-facilitating the creation of a young gay and bisexual men’s community in which young gay and bisexual men encourage each other to practice safer sex.

Requirements for all positions: Must be knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS prevention with gay men, gay male sexuality and gay male issues. Must be familiar with the local young gay/bisexual men’s community. Must be able to work effectively and sensitively with homosexually active men of varying socio-cultural backgrounds and levels of homosexual identification. Must be able to work collaboratively in a team setting. Must be comfortable discussing sex with young gay/bisexual men. Must be able to work evenings and weekends, as necessary.

Education and Experience: Must have minimum of one year college education or six months relevant experience in paid/volunteer work on AIDS-related or gay community issues or an equivalent combination of education and experience. See specific job descriptions and requirements below for each position.

For more information and application materials, contact:
Joe Schmoe, Project Assistant
1234 ABC RD.
Austin, TX 94105
555/555-5555 (call collect)

Download this form as a Word document at www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure3-1-b.doc
Sample Job Announcement
(a more detailed job announcement)

Position Available

Outreach Coordinator

HIV Prevention Program for Young Gay & Bisexual Men

The Outreach Coordinator will coordinate the peer outreach component of an HIV prevention and community-building Project for young gay and bisexual men between the ages of 18 and 29. The community-based, peer run prevention program is an innovative and evolving program that includes a combination of peer-led small group safer sex workshops and peer outreach. The essence of the program is community mobilization and empowerment and creating a process by which young gay and bisexual men encourage each other to practice safer sex.

Responsibilities will include:
- participating in the design and preparation of outreach activities
- recruiting, training and supervising young gay and bisexual men to participate in peer outreach activities
- organizing and running weekly outreach planning meetings
- participating in the development of safer sex educational materials to be used in outreach activities
- participating in outreach activities
- attending Project staff meetings
- participating in community advisory board meetings
- keeping records of outreach activities
- co-facilitating small group safer sex workshops for young gay and bisexual men

Skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary:
Must have demonstrated leadership qualities and ability to work independently. Must be creative and energetic. Theatrical skills are helpful. Must be able to work collaboratively in a team setting. Must have excellent interpersonal communication skills. Must be comfortable discussing sex with young gay and bisexual men. Must be knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS prevention with gay men, gay male sexuality, and gay male issues. Must be able to work effectively and sensitively with homosexually active men of varying socio-cultural backgrounds and levels of homosexual identification. Must be able to work evenings and weekends, as necessary

Education and Experience:
Must have minimum of one year college education or experience in theater or six months experience in paid/volunteer work on AIDS-related or gay community issues, or an equivalent combination of education and experience.

For more information and application materials, contact:
Joe Schmoe, Project Assistant
1234 ABC RD.
Austin, TX 94105
555/555-5555

Download this form as a Word document at
www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure3-1-c.doc
Sample Job Announcement
(a more detailed job announcement)

2 Positions Available

Small Groups Coordinator
HIV Prevention Program for Young Gay & Bisexual Men

The Small Groups Coordinator will coordinate the small groups component of an HIV prevention and community-building program for young gay and bisexual men between the ages of 18 and 29. The community-based, peer run prevention program is an innovative and evolving program that includes a combination of peer-led small group safer sex workshops and peer outreach. The essence of the program is community mobilization and empowerment - creating a process by which young gay and bisexual men encourage each other to practice safer sex.

Responsibilities will include:
• participating in the design and preparation of small groups for young gay and bisexual men
• recruiting young gay and bisexual men to participate in groups
• telephoning and scheduling men to attend groups
• facilitating small groups for young gay and bisexual men
• developing and organizing materials/supplies to be used in groups
• attending Project staff meetings
• participating in community advisory board meetings
• keeping records of group activities

Skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary:
Must have skills in group facilitation. Must be able to work collaboratively in a team setting. Must show initiative and be able to work independently as necessary. Must have excellent interpersonal communication skills. Must be comfortable discussing sex with young gay and bisexual men. Must be knowledgeable about AIDS prevention with gay men, gay male sexuality, and gay male issues. Must be able to work effectively and sensitively with homosexually active men of varying socio-cultural backgrounds and levels of homosexual identification. Must be able to work evenings and weekends, as necessary.

Education and Experience:
Must have minimum of one year college education or experience in group facilitation or six months experience in paid/volunteer work on AIDS-related or gay community issues or an equivalent combination of education and experience.

For more information and application materials, contact:
Joe Schmoe, Project Assistant
1234 ABC RD.
Austin, TX 94105
555/555-5555

Download this form as a Word document at
www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure3-1-d.doc
How did you hear about the job?

What do you know about the Project so far?

We’d like to first ask you some questions about yourself and your background, and then we’ll ask some more specific questions relevant to the job responsibilities of the Coordinators.

How long have you lived in ________________? What brought you here?

What are your plans/goals for the future?

Why would you like to be a Project Coordinator?

Which Coordinator position are you interested in being? Why?

What experiences have you had that are relevant to this position?

How familiar are you with the young gay/bisexual men’s community here in ________________?

How would you say young gay/bisexual men in ________________ are responding to the AIDS crisis?

What approaches do you think would work best to promote safer sex among young gay/bisexual men in ________________?

What types of outreach activities do you think would be effective?

Do you have any experience or knowledge of community organizing or community empowerment? Describe.

Any thoughts on how the Project can serve a community-building role in ________________?

What would you say are your special strengths or skills relevant to being a Coordinator for this Project?

What might be your weaknesses or areas where you would need extra training for this position?

What experience do you have supervising or organizing other people?

Do you have any experience with theater or performance art?

Do you have any experience in making outreach materials, like flyers or brochures?

Do you have any experience running groups?

How would you describe your style of running a group?

How would you describe your style of running a meeting?

Do you have any experience in creating or organizing group or community events?

The Coordinators need to work independently and take lots of initiative. How do you feel about that?
What experience do you have working independently?

What do you think would be effective ways to get young men to participate in the Project?

How would you motivate young men to volunteer to be involved with the Project?

How would you maintain the morale and enthusiasm of volunteers so they want to stay involved with the Project?

We want the Project to reach all the different subgroups of young gay/bisexual men in _____.

What subgroups of young gay/bisexual men would you say there are in _______?

What groups would you say you have contacts with?

How do you feel about whether or not people are “out” about their sexual orientation?

How do you feel about people who want to be nonpolitical - don't want to do anything about AIDS, gay rights, etc.?

What would you recommend be done to reach the different groups?

What about men who are just coming out or are fairly closeted - how would you encourage them?

The Project is run using a team-oriented style. How do you feel about working as part of a team?

What types of decision-making processes do you prefer?

There may at times be conflicts or disagreements among the Coordinators. How would you resolve these conflicts?

The Coordinator position involves lots of “on-the-job” training. How are you at dealing with criticism?

How do you give criticism to people you're working with?

What if you disagree with our decisions or approaches. How would you deal with that?

Since the Project is very gay- and sex-positive and is targeted at young people, it may be very controversial in the community. Do you have any thoughts about what should be done to make sure the community accepts the Project - or at least doesn’t interfere with it?

How much time would you be able to devote to this Project?

If you’ll be a student (or working at another job simultaneously) during the Project, how would you balance your involvement on the Project with your other commitments?

What do you see as your priorities?

Do you have any questions?

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Appendix Module 3: Implementing Agency

Sample Job Application

Name______________________________________________________________
Address ____________________________________________________________
Day Phone ____________________________     Evening Phone_________________________
Age _______
Best time to reach you ______________________________________________
How long have you lived in our community? _______________________________________

EDUCATION

Name/City/State Dates Attended Major Degree
High School___________________________________________________________________
College ______________________________________________________________________

(At least 3 employers: sample info)

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Please list your employment history for the past three years, beginning with your present, or most recent employer.

Employer ___________________________________________________________________
Address ______________________________________________________________________
Supervisor _________________________________________________________________
Phone ________________________________________________________________________
Dates Employed ______________________________________________________________
Description of Job Duties _________________________________________________________
(At least 2 references: sample info)

REFERENCES

1. Name ________________________________________________________________
Address _______________________________________________________________
Day Phone ____________________________ Evening Phone __________________________
Capacity in which known _________________________________________________
How long? _______________________________________________________________

Which of the positions are you most interested in filling?
_____ Outreach Coordinator
_____ Small Groups Coordinator

Why would you like to work for the HIV Prevention/Community-building Program?
________________________________________________________________________

Please describe any experience or information about yourself that would be helpful in evaluating
your potential for this position.
________________________________________________________________________

Download this form as a Word document at
www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure3-3.doc
**Figure 3.4 Mpowerment Project Suggested Annual Expenses**

*PLEASE NOTE:* This budget was updated in 2009. All costs are approximate and will greatly vary from city to city (especially salary and rent). It is very important that you research the actual costs in your city before submitting a budget.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personnel Expenses ²</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary ($75,000)</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits (13%) ($9,750)</td>
<td>$7,800</td>
<td>$5,850</td>
<td>$3,900</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel sub-total</td>
<td>$84,750</td>
<td>$67,800</td>
<td>$50,850</td>
<td>$33,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Operating Expenses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rent</th>
<th>$18,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>$1,680</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Food and Drinks**

| Sub-total Formal Outreach Events | $6,500 | $5,500 | $4,000 | $2,500 |
| Sub-total Core Group | $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 |
| Sub-total M groups | $600 | $600 | $600 | $600 |
| Sub-total Bar/Community Outreach | $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 |

**Event Food & Drink Totals** ³

| $9,500 | $8,500 | $7,000 | $5,500 |

**Supplies** ³

| $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 |

**Advertising**

| $5,500 | $4,750 | $3,600 | $2,400 |

**Printing/Copying**

| $1,900 | $1,600 | $1,200 | $800 |

**Condoms/Lube**

| $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 |

**Travel (Local Mileage)**

| $750 | $600 | $450 | $300 |

**Phone** ³

| $1,000 | $800 | $600 | $400 |

**Education Materials** ³

| $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 | $1,200 |

**Internet Service Provider**

| $600 | $600 | $600 | $600 |

**Administration** ³

| $2,800 | $2,800 | $2,800 | $2,800 |

**Operating expense sub-total**

| $45,330 | $42,930 | $39,530 | $36,080 |

**Total**

| $130,080 | $110,730 | $90,380 | $74,950 |
1 The annual operating expenses do not include one-time “start-up” costs which you will want to include for your agency’s calculations. These costs fall under three categories and include:

a) Furnishings for the Project Space: est. $4,000
   Computers, Printer, Fax Machine, Desks, Chairs, Telephones, Plants, Bulletin Board, BBQ Grill, Couches, Kitchen Stuff, Coffee maker, Bookshelves, Books, Television, DVD Player, Stereo, Tables, Lawnmower, Weed eater, Extension cords, Carpets, Pillows, Sporting equipment

b) Security deposit for the Project Space, utilities, telephone and Internet service: est. $1500-$2500
   Usually 1-2 months rent, and the cost of setting up utilities, phone and Internet service vary by region.

c) Travel expenses for Mpowerment Project training: est. $1200 per person
   Airfare, hotel, per diem and the Mpowerment Project Training fee ($100.00/person)

2 Expenses based on A) 2.5 FTE or B) 2.0 FTE or C) 1.5 FTE or D) 1.0 FTE—we recommend at least 1 FTE. 2.5 is the ideal, so adjust the budget accordingly if you are able to secure additional funding.

3 The sub-totals reflect our recommended proportions between each Project activity.

4 Supplies: e.g., paper, flipcharts, pens, markers, printer cartridges, computer supplies.

5 Telephone: One business line with call waiting and voicemail per fte.

6 Education/promotional materials: e.g., t-shirts, buttons, posters, videos, and brochures.

7 Administration: Most administrative costs are covered by agency and are not in the program budget—e.g., insurance (worker’s comp, liability, office contents), bookkeeping, accounting, employee development, computer support.
mPowerment

Together
creating community
for friendship
for health
for life

mpowerment.org
The Center for AIDS Prevention Studies
University of California, San Francisco
50 Beale Street, Suite 1300
San Francisco, CA 94105
415.597.9306

Download a PDF of Module 3: Implementing Agency, at
Coordinators

Objectives

To familiarize you with the role of Project Coordinators, including:

1. their responsibilities;
2. how to configure their roles when there is more than one Coordinator;
3. characteristics of effective Coordinators;
4. use of behavioral objectives to supervise Coordinators, including sample behavioral objectives;
5. their training needs; and
6. Coordinator evaluation duties.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module

Figure 4.1. Sample Behavioral Objectives for Coordinators
Coordinators are a vital Core Element of the Mpowerment Project intervention. The Coordinators are young gay/bisexual men who are the Project’s paid staff and are directly responsible for running the Project on a day-to-day basis. It is critical to hire talented and committed young men to coordinate the Project. As we have worked with organizations implementing the Mpowerment Project, we have found that they may be the single most important ingredient that leads to a Project’s success. Module 3: Implementing Agency describes how to locate good Coordinators, the characteristics to look for in them, and how to supervise them. As described in that module, it is imperative that the Coordinators receive the support they need to carry out their jobs effectively, and supervision is a critical aspect of providing that support.
The Mpowerment Project has multiple components that work together synergistically. As we discuss throughout this manual, it is important to implement all of the Core Elements. To do this most effectively, we recommend having at least 1.5 Coordinators. However, if the program is being implemented in a large city, 2 or more Coordinators is preferable. Implementing the intervention with one full-time Coordinator or two half-time Coordinators is possible, but more challenging. It is unlikely that the Mpowerment Project can be implemented successfully with less than a full-time person. It is important to recognize that the Mpowerment Project’s objectives are to change the social environment, build a supportive, healthy community of young gay/bisexual men, and mobilize that community to fight HIV. This simply is not possible to do with less than a full-time Coordinator.

**Coordinator roles**

The Project Coordinators serve three important functions of equal importance:

- They are responsible for coordinating the Project and for ensuring that different activities such as Social Outreach Events, publicity, and M-groups are carried out.

- They are the starting points (along with the Core Group) for the diffusion process, one of the Guiding Principles, that spreads the safer sex message to all young gay/bisexual men in the community. If one envisions the diffusion process as a pond with ripples emanating outward from the center, the Coordinators are the pebbles dropped into the pond that begin creating the ripples.

- They facilitate the empowerment of the young gay/bisexual men who join the Project as volunteers. Empowerment of young men is another Guiding Principle of the Project.
### Responsibilities of the Project Coordinators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>TASKS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Assessment</td>
<td>Conduct formal community assessment.</td>
<td>Conduct it at the outset of Project and review it often. Knowledge about diversity of community is critical for effective outreach (See Module 2 for more information).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Outreach Team Coordination</td>
<td>Prepare and present Social Outreach performances at gay bars, community events, and events that the Project hosts. Distribute promotional materials about upcoming Project events at gay venues.</td>
<td>This part of “formal outreach” and is a critical way of getting the message out to the community that the Project exists. Therefore, it is crucial that outreach be conducted periodically in the community in order to reach young gay/bisexual men who have not heard of the Project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Outreach Events Coordination (formal outreach)</td>
<td>Prepare and hold various types of events. These include: • recurring, smaller activities held at Project space • larger events that occur periodically • special one-time events • prepare and disseminate publicity to media and other materials at M-groups.</td>
<td>All Social Outreach Events should contain an HIV-prevention promotional component. Events also should contribute to young gay/bisexual men’s sense of a growing, supportive community. (See Module 7: Formal Outreach-Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials Team Coordination</td>
<td>Develop attractive, appealing materials for: • safer sex promotion • informal outreach • general publicity about Project • M-groups</td>
<td>The goal is to develop materials that attract attention to the Project, are uplifting and interesting, and that young men will want to keep or pass on to their friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-groups Coordination</td>
<td>Ensure that M-groups are conducted. This includes: • recruiting young men to attend M-groups • ensuring that recruitment for M-groups occurs at every outreach activity the Project hosts and that all volunteers, including Core Group members, attend M-groups • facilitating M-groups</td>
<td>It is critical that M-groups be held, because this is where young men receive the largest “dose” of HIV prevention messages, including skills for negotiating safer sex. It is also where they learn about the community-building goal of the Project and they become trained and motivated to conduct informal outreach with their friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Plan for and conduct ongoing evaluation of how the Project is going, and the extent to which the program is being implemented with fidelity to the original ideas and methods of the Mpowerment Project.</td>
<td>It is important to consider evaluation from the outset of implementing this Project. The Coordinators should become very aware of the Mpowerment Project Program Logic Model, how to evaluate the Project, and how to use the information to keep the Project on track. (See Module 12: Evaluation.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the most important aspects of the Project Coordinators’ role is reflection. By this we mean the process by which Coordinators continually assess Project activities to determine if they are achieving their objectives and are being experienced as fresh and new. If the Project remains the same over time it will lose its sense of excitement and will stop attracting new men. This is why it is imperative to assess Project activities and consider how to improve them, which involves discussions with the Core Group and the Project Supervisor. When assessing the effectiveness of past activities, there are some questions that Coordinators will want to ask. For example, are we reaching new groups of young men? Are young men talking with each other about safer sex? Are they taking over ownership of the Project? Below we describe many of the Project’s intervention’s activities, and the Coordinators’ role in implementing them.

An important area for the Coordinators to reflect concerns the Guiding Principles (See Module 1: Overview for a description of the Guiding Principles). Some of these are indirectly referred to above. For example, in the question, “Are they taking over ownership of the Project?” a Coordinator is essentially asking if the Guiding Principle of empowerment is occurring. In the question, “Are young men talking with each other about safer sex?” the Guiding Principles of peer mobilization and diffusion are being analyzed. The Guiding Principles should stay utmost in the Coordinators minds as they reflect on the Project, to ensure that the principles are being enacted.

**Formal Outreach**

Formal outreach refers to outreach events and activities that are organized by Coordinators and the Core Group. It includes two types of activities: 1) the myriad of Project-sponsored Social Outreach Events designed to attract young gay/bisexual men (e.g., dances, parties, picnics, sporting activities, discussion groups, gatherings, barbecues, meals)
and 2) the Outreach Team’s performances at gay bars and community events, including performances at events the Project hosts. Formal outreach not only facilitates dispersion of the Project’s HIV prevention messages, like safer sex promotion and HIV testing promotion, it also helps young gay/bisexual men develop a growing sense of a supportive community. All Social Outreach Events should contain one or more HIV prevention components.

Good planning and coordination are the keys to formal outreach. With respect to Social Outreach Events, it is especially important for the Coordinators to ensure that such planning occurs. For recurring events, planning may be minimal, while larger events will involve substantial time, effort, publicity, and coordination. In order to be most effective, those involved in the planning must make sure that Social Outreach efforts attracts diverse segments of gay/bisexual men in the community, and that all segments of the community will find some events that appeal to them. Therefore, a variety of Social Outreach Events are necessary to reach a broad range of young men in every community. The materials or publicity team is responsible for developing attractive, appealing materials promoting safer sex and testing for these events. In order to make sure that the Project reaches its goals, it is vital that every event includes active efforts to recruit young gay/bisexual men into M-groups. *(For more information on formal outreach, see Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Teams.)* The Coordinators are in charge of ensuring that the HIV prevention activities at Social Outreach Events occur, that materials promoting safer sex and testing are developed and distributed, and that men are recruited for M-groups at all outreach events.

**Informal Outreach**

Many people think that Informal Outreach is about spreading the word about the Mpowerment Project. In fact, Informal Outreach is much more than that: it is about guys talking with and supporting each other about the need to have safer sex and know their current HIV serostatus. It is called “Informal” Outreach because the discussions happen during casual conversations with peers. The M-groups motivate and teach young men to talk with friends informally and on their own time about the need for safer sex and testing, but additional effort is needed to make sure that people engage in Informal Outreach continuously. Coordinators can encourage others to conduct Informal Outreach by reminding men in the program to talk to their friends about HIV, testing, and safer sex. Coordinators can add Informal Outreach to Core Group agendas,
Informal Outreach is men encouraging each other about having safer sex and knowing their current HIV status—not just spreading the word about the Project.

to remind Core Group members to keep talking to their friends. Additionally, when Coordinators themselves have these types of conversations with men in the Project, they are modeling how to conduct and the importance of conducting Informal Outreach, which is a powerful learning tool (See Module 8: Informal Outreach for more information about informal outreach).

**M-groups**
Throughout the Project, Coordinators will recruit young gay/bisexual men to attend M-groups. M-groups are a fun way for these men to meet others, find out about the Project, and hear how young men are dealing with issues of importance to them such as sex, dating, and relationships. Since the M-groups are a major method for supporting informal outreach, it is critical to continually assess whether the community’s diverse segments of young gay/bisexual men are being recruited into M-groups. Coordinators and trained volunteers can facilitate the M-groups (See Module 9: M-groups for more information on M-groups).

**Weekly Core Group meetings**
The Core Group is the main decision-making body of the Mpowerment Project, and generally consists of 12 to 20 members. The Coordinators participate in Core Group meetings on an equal basis with all other members. However, Coordinators play a special role in keeping the Project’s mission and goals uppermost in Core Group deliberations. They set the agendas for the meetings (and ask for input from the Core Group), usually facilitate or co-facilitate the meetings, ensure that the meetings stay on track, seek to make the meetings an empowering experience for Core Group members, and promote and model a reflective versus an impulsive decision-making process. Additionally, Coordinators are also responsible for nurturing and supporting Core Group members to ensure that they have a good experience volunteering for the Project. It is important for Coordinators to recognize the important contributions that Core Group members make to the Project and to make sure that all volunteers feel welcome and appreciated (See Module 5: Core Group for more information on Core Group).
Evaluation activities

As described in Module 12: Evaluation, it is important that the approach to evaluation used in the Project be considered from the start of implementation. At a minimum, information needs to be collected regarding how the intervention is implemented, including how many activities are conducted, how many men attend the activities, and so forth. The Coordinators will need to carry out these evaluation activities from the start (See Module 12: Evaluation for more information about evaluation).

Community Assessment

Although the Coordinators ideally come from diverse segments of young gay/bisexual men in the community, it is still highly unlikely that when they pool their shared knowledge they will have a complete understanding of the community’s diversity. While Coordinators are usually knowledgeable about the social groups they belong to, they are often much less familiar with other groups. It is also important to recognize that the diversity represented in the Project extends beyond racial and ethnic groups. It can include a range of ages, student/non-student status, types of interests (such as artists, political activists, athletes), and class and educational differences. A full and shared understanding of the diversity of the community is required if the Project is to reach all segments of young gay/bisexual men in the community. Hence, one of the Coordinators’ first tasks is to conduct the Community Assessment (See Module 2: Community Assessment for a detailed look at conducting community assessments).
Working together and dividing up responsibilities

Coordinators must be able to work together effectively as a team because everything that one Coordinator does affects the work of the other Coordinator(s) either directly or indirectly. For example, one Coordinator’s ability to run M-groups relies on another Coordinator’s outreach efforts that effectively identify men to attend the groups. This interdependence requires the Coordinators to work together closely, be in frequent communication, and know what each other is doing, particularly as it pertains to their own responsibilities. Sometimes agencies think it is best to simply let the Coordinators work together and decide among themselves who will take on which responsibilities. What we have found, however, is that when this happens, many tasks fall to the wayside, as each Coordinator says, “That’s not my job.” We describe below different ways of configuring the Coordinators’ roles, clearly delineating responsibilities.

An important way to foster teamwork and ensure that all tasks are being accomplished is for the Coordinators to have a weekly, regularly scheduled meeting. At these meetings, they can go over each other’s behavioral objectives
to ensure that tasks are identified, assigned to someone responsible for completing them, and that progress is being made (See Figure 4.1. in the Appendix to this module for sample behavioral objectives used in Austin, TX). The intent here is not to have Coordinators supervise each other's work, but rather to ensure that tasks are being accomplished that fall within each Coordinator’s area of responsibility.

For example, in order to successfully recruit for M-groups, the Coordinator in charge of M-groups needs to obtain the names of young men attending outreach events. This means that the Outreach Coordinator systematically collects the names of men attending the events and then turns them over to the M-group Coordinator for follow-up. Likewise, the Outreach Coordinator relies on whoever is in charge of publicity to get materials out to advertise and promote upcoming activities and events. During their weekly meetings, the Coordinators can also brainstorm about other Project issues, make plans for future activities (such as a Core Group or Community Advisory Board meeting), debrief about recently completed activities, and generally provide support for each other.

In our research that looked at how the Mpowerment Project was being implemented across the country, we observed that when Coordinators worked independently of one another without meeting to discuss progress on their respective responsibilities, they ended up not supporting each other.

**Configuration of two full-time Coordinator positions**

- **Outreach Coordinator** is responsible for coordinating the Project's events, the outreach team, and publicity. This position also co-facilitates M-groups, Core Group meetings, and has administrative and evaluation responsibilities.

- **Small Group Coordinator** is responsible for recruiting young men to participate in M-groups, making all preparations for M-groups, and co-facilitating them. He is also responsible for administrative and evaluation duties.
Coordinators should be outgoing, comfortable talking to strangers, passionate about HIV prevention and community-building, willing to share decision-making power, and enthusiastic about conducting all the Core Elements.

and the Project often fared poorly. Coordinators may not always be best friends, may travel in different social circles, and may have different interests, but they will function most effectively if they communicate easily and often with each other.

As stated at the start of this module, we suggest having the equivalent of two full-time positions to carry out the Coordinator duties. Below, we show how responsibilities can be shared between two positions.

During the interview process, you might find that the skills and abilities of the candidates do not divide themselves neatly into these pre-designated areas of responsibility. For this reason, although the job announcements may describe the jobs in specific ways, once the most capable candidates from diverse segments of the community have been selected, you can then reconfigure job responsibilities in order to fit the strengths and expertise of the individuals hired (See Module 3: Implementing Agency for sample Coordinator job announcements). We highly recommend that new programs implementing the Mpowerment Project follow this procedure. Additionally, sometimes after Coordinators have started their jobs, it becomes clear that their roles need to be reconfigured to reflect their strengths in different areas. Often the Coordinators themselves become aware of this; if so, they should discuss possible changes in roles with their Project Supervisor.

Many Projects will only be able to fund the equivalent of one full-time position, or 1-1/2 positions rather than two. As stated earlier, we urge that if at all possible try to have at least 1 to 1-1/2 positions, given all the work that has to be accomplished. If the project can only afford the equivalent of one position, we recommend hiring two half-time Coordinators rather than one working full-time. Between them, they are more likely to possess the broad range of skills required in administering the Project, and they can then support each other in analyzing the program’s effectiveness and in planning Project activities. In addition, it is important to remember that the Coordinators are the initiators of the diffusion process—the ones who begin spreading the HIV-prevention message to their own social networks. By hiring at least two Coordinators who come from very different segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community, this will increase the Project’s ability to reach a much more diverse cross-section of men.
**Characteristics of effective Coordinators**

Coordinators need to possess strong leadership skills, and the most successful Coordinators are those who are self-starters, extremely responsible, and well organized. These traits are critical because the Coordinators oversee a broad range of activities including M-groups, Social Outreach Events, outreach at bars and community events, publicity, administration, and ongoing evaluation. Coordinators also must possess a high degree of maturity, regardless of their chronological age. They must be willing to be reflective about the Project’s functioning and their roles within the intervention. Hiring Coordinators who have a strong personal commitment to HIV/AIDS prevention or to gay community issues, as demonstrated through their past work and/or volunteer history is also extremely important. If Coordinators don’t have a strong personal commitment to the goals of the Project, it will be extremely difficult to motivate them to conduct Informal Outreach through their own friendship networks or to put in the effort required to make the Project successful. Furthermore, Coordinators who require a step-by-step cookbook approach to guide them in performing their jobs are unlikely to be able to perform these complicated roles effectively.

An important part of being a Coordinator involves motivating other people to plan and carry out activities, and sharing ownership of the Project with them. Coordinators who share responsibilities for decision-making with Project participants—instead of just telling them what to do or assigning volunteer tasks—are more successful. The reality is that Coordinators can’t do all the work themselves, and they will accomplish a great deal more if they work collaboratively with others using a nonhierarchical organizational approach. Also, by sharing the authority for developing plans and making decisions with other Project participants, Coordinators are advancing an important goal of the Project, namely empowering the young gay/bisexual men’s community.

There are many ways that effective Coordinators accomplish this. One key strategy is to encourage Core Group members to reflect on their roles and decisions, including the implications of their decisions. It is not the role of the Coordinators to tell the group exactly what to do or to overtly point out mistakes. This approach fosters a sense of empowerment among Project volunteers and builds strong decision-making skills, while at the same time it keeps the group on track.
Use of behavioral objectives

Behavioral objectives are tasks that the Project Coordinators are striving to accomplish. The term “behavioral” is used deliberately so that it focuses on specific tasks that need to be done, rather than general issues. Developing behavioral objectives is an excellent way for Coordinators to identify and prioritize their tasks each week (See Figure 4.1 in Appendix to this module to see sample behavioral objectives developed and used by the Mpowerment Project in Austin, TX). Project Supervisors can review current and past behavioral objectives and discuss and refine them during supervision meetings (See Module 3: Implementing Agency for hints and tips on supervising Coordinators). Following the meeting, the Project Coordinators then rewrite their behavioral objectives, if necessary, and give a copy to the Project Supervisor for review.

As a tool for monitoring performance, the use of behavioral objectives is empowering, since it provides a reference point against which the Coordinators can measure their progress in achieving the objectives they have set for themselves. Behavioral objectives will be related to the Project’s overall objectives, but they are not identical. The Project objectives might include such items as “hold four M-groups in 3 months.” In contrast, an associated behavioral objective might be “recruit 10 men for next week’s M-group by...” As this example illustrates, the behavioral objectives are the small steps that must be taken in order to reach the Project objectives.
Training Coordinators and obtaining the information needed to run the Mpowerment Project

We know from our research of how the Mpowerment Project is being implemented across the country that staff turnover is a major issue that affects implementation. In the study, 35% of the CBOs we talked to experienced turnover of Coordinators in the first six months. In the first year, 56% experienced turnover, with 23% of those agencies experiencing Coordinator turnover multiple times. Of course each time a new staff member is hired, that person needs to be trained. It is important for new Coordinators to attend training on how to conduct the Mpowerment Project, even if they were already involved in the Project before taking on their new position. Being a Coordinator rather than a volunteer requires a broader overview of the goals, objectives, and methods of the intervention and being trained to conduct the Mpowerment Project will help ensure this broader view. In addition, it is important to get training and read all of the materials and the website because sometimes a Project has “drifted” away from the Mpowerment Project’s Guiding Principles and unintentionally has stopped implementing the Core Elements as described in the model. Attending training can help the new Coordinator become aware of and then address this drift. Therefore, it is crucial that new Coordinators read the Project manuals and study the various training materials, much of which is online at www.mpowerment.org.

Gaining group facilitation skills

It is important that all Coordinators obtain training on how to facilitate meetings, since each will be working with groups. Depending on Coordinators’ areas of responsibility, they may be working with M-groups, volunteer teams, or a Community Advisory Board. It is especially important that Coordinators responsible for the M-groups be skilled at facilitating discussions and drawing out more
Being up-to-date on HIV prevention

In order to be current and well informed about issues related to HIV prevention, all Coordinators need:

- a thorough understanding of the most up-to-date information on how HIV is transmitted and prevented
- knowledge about HIV testing in the community (where to obtain testing, and which sites are culturally sensitive for diverse groups of young gay/bisexual men)
- basic information about treatment (it is not necessary to have a great deal of expertise on this since men who need treatment should be referred to health care providers)
- knowledge about the latest research findings on HIV prevention, including HIV prevention efforts for gay/bisexual men of color.
- familiarity with the local and national epidemiological distribution of HIV disease.

Information on all these topics is available from local or regional AIDS service organizations. There are also some excellent electronic resources that Coordinators can use that will keep them up-to-date on the latest information. For example, the CDC puts out a daily report on HIV/AIDS drawn from scientific journals and newspapers (http://www.cdcnpin.org/lyris/ui/listservs.aspx), and the CDC’s website also contains many online resources (http://www.cdc.gov/hiv). The University of California, San Francisco’s HIVInsite website (http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu) has information on many aspects of HIV, and the NMAC (National Minority AIDS Council) website is another useful resource (http://www.nmac.org). Another good site is one run by the Kaiser Family Foundation (http://www.kaisernetwork.org), which is updated daily. Daily or weekly list serves can also be very helpful, and the Kaiser Family Foundation also offers email subscriptions to news and events at http://www.kff.org/profile/subscriptions.cfm. Another excellent list serve of recent scholarly articles about HIV/AIDS can be joined by emailing Robert Malow of Florida International University at rmalow@bellsouth.net.
Evaluating the project by reflecting on its Guiding Principles

In addition to tracking the number of men attending M-groups or outreach activities, it’s important for Coordinators to think about how Project activities relate to the Mpowerment Project’s Guiding Principles. The Coordinators should continually review the Guiding Principles to ensure that the Project is being implemented in accordance with them (See Module 1: Overview for a detailed description of the Guiding Principles). For example, Coordinators must remember that the Project should:

- focus on social issues as a way of attracting young gay/bisexual men
- help empower the young men involved
- strive to develop a stronger sense of community through the development of more social networks among young men
- infuse all Project activities with HIV prevention messages.

Ultimately it is the Coordinators’ responsibility to ensure that these principles and others are being applied throughout all aspects of the Project. Some key areas for the Coordinators to pay attention to are described below.

Empowerment of volunteers

It is very important that the Coordinators continually consider the extent to which they are empowering volunteers, including those involved in the Core Group. By having the volunteers make and implement decisions about the Project, they gain a real sense of ownership of the Project and its activities. As a result, they will be more willing to work on the Project, and more likely to take its messages and goals as their own. This includes an increased willingness to spread the message of safer sex to their friends, publicize the Project’s activities through word-of-mouth to their friends, and invite their friends to join the Project.

This approach is one of the unique components of the Mpowerment Project—namely that the process of working on a product or event often is as important as getting the product or event completed. For instance, consider the following scenario. A Coordinator could work by himself to develop materials to promote safer sex, and often could do so in less time than if he were to delegate the task to volunteers. However, suppose instead that he worked with two volunteers to create those materials and afterwards they expressed pride at having done so. Then the extra time it took the
volunteers to carry out this task was more than justified by their sense of accomplishment and a feeling that the material’s message is their own.

For this reason, it is critical for the Coordinators to continually evaluate if volunteers are feeling a sense of ownership for the Project or if, instead, they feel that the Coordinators make all the decisions and do the most important work. It’s also worthwhile remembering that once volunteers gain experience working on any task, the Coordinator can spend less time working with them in the future, so the initial investment in time is likely to result in a time-savings later on.

Another area that requires constant monitoring is to what extent programs are reaching diverse segments of gay/bisexual men in the community. It is the responsibility of the Coordinators to keep revisiting this issue, and bringing it up at Core Group meetings. By periodically referring back to the community assessment results (See Module 2: Community Assessment), the Coordinators and Core Group can determine if all the groups of young gay/bisexual men in the community are represented at Project activities. Concerted efforts are necessary to ensure that formal outreach targets diverse groups, and that diverse groups are part of the Core Group and participate in M-groups.

When the Mpowerment Project was first implemented at several research sites, Coordinators successfully attracted many young gay/bisexual men of color into the Core Group and M-groups. In fact, these segments of young men ended up being overrepresented in both areas by comparison to demographics of the cities involved. This demonstrates that it is possible to reach such groups even if they have been underrepresented in community programs in the past.

The Project Coordinators need to reflect continually about the Core Group in order to ensure diversity in its membership. Of equal importance, however, is ensuring that the Core Group does not become cliquish and turn into a social club that does not actively welcome and encourage new participants (See Module 5: Core Group for more information about the perils of cliquishness). Since the Coordinators are central to the Core Group’s successful functioning, they play a significant role in maintaining the group’s openness.

Always Reflect, Reflect, Reflect. Ask yourself: “Are we following the Guiding Principles of the Project?”
Sample behavioral objectives (from AMP, Austin Men’s Project)

Scheduling for M-groups:

- Utilize Core Group very heavily EVERY week to recruit to M-groups. There are several guys chomping at the bit to help with this.

- We developed a new sample recruiting dialogue for Core Group members to follow (See below).

- Continue to recruit heavily to Core Group itself because Core Group members usually will attend an M-group after coming to at least 1 Core Group meeting.

- Work with the materials team to develop a “rave card” that will promote Core Group and M-groups. These are 4x4 inch cards that have information on them about Core Group, AMP, and M-groups. We will distribute them in little stacks throughout the community. Young gay/bi men will pick them out and pick them up because they are pretty.

- Update the call log every WEEKDAY to stay abreast of who has been scheduled, and who to reminder call, and whom we have already called. Work with the materials team to develop and produce the M-groups posters.

- Work with the M-groups committee to get those guys into the process of recruiting.

- Provide them with fliers and invites, and scheduling cards

- Plus they will be able to call us up to let us know when who is scheduled for when

- Provide them with calendars with the M-group dates to schedule their friends

- Review the new sample dialogue with them. Run M-groups ad in the papers.

- Tuesday I’ll write and send out the press releases for M-groups to: The Austin Chronicle, This Week In Texas, Ambush, And the Texas Triangle.

- Jesse and I will sit down after our Coordinator meeting and schedule the rest of the guys we need for Thursday’s M-group (and on up to the next few weeks, if possible) and compile our recruitment lists... I’ll also send out the outreach e-mails at this time...the review of the whole shebang will come on Wednesday when we are done.
Sample dialogue

**M-group recruiting dialogue:**

Provide a casual conversation script for the guys to use while recruiting for M-groups:

**“What is an M-group?”**

It’s a really cool, one time discussion group...but it is totally comfortable. You meet, like, 8-10 other guys and talk about who you like to meet, and when, and how, and where. And sex. Everybody likes to talk about sex, so we do that a whole lot, and it gets really hysterical.

**“So what do you do there?”**

Talk mostly, and there’s a couple of thinking exercises. You write down a bunch of stuff, in groups, and then hang it on the wall and talk about it.

**“Like what?”**

It’s a surprise. And it’s surprising to see what people come up with. You know, people always say “I’m tired of the bar, I’m tired of meeting men at the bar, or I’m tired of internet hook-ups...where do I go yadda yadda yadda...,” well, AMP is it! M-groups are it... it’s sort of the introduction to AMP, too, and it’s not like we’re anti-bar... we’re “alternative.” You’ll really enjoy it. C’mon, whaddya say?

**Outreach**

The outreach team met Friday night AFTER outreach, and we had a little talk about the Homecoming Dance Event. I’ll complete and turn-in the Homecoming Dance Event Planning Form tonight. This is the rough sketch of our suggestions.
**Event promotion**

We’ll dress up in jeans and white t-shirts with ELABORATE sashes around our manly chests. And we’ll wear little crowns (Homecoming Kings... get it?) This is to pass out fliers in the bars for the event itself. Maybe AMP T-shirts. We’ll see. I’ll be preparing for event promotion outreach right before Core Group, getting all the uniforms out and ready to go. After Core Group, we’ll meet with the outreach guys, and then all head over to Charlie’s. We want to galvanize all the guys tomorrow, really inspire faith that we’ll get this job done. And we really feel that the only way to do that is to have our plan set up and ready tomorrow night. And it is, and will be. Our plan is to meet at Little City on Congress, get ready there, and walk over together as a group. We are also able to generate interest at Little City while we are getting ready.

**Safer sex promotion**

Buy carnations, or roses, whichever I can find cheaper. Then we’ll tie a little packet on to it with condoms and materials inside, and then pin them onto the guys that attend. We have no idea what to put in them yet. We’ll decide that next week, and I will include it in my next set of objectives. This is a week and a half before the event, so there is still time to incorporate any feedback you might have. And we will figure out then what performance will entail as well. We know its going to be presenting 6 garters to 3 runner-up couples, and then presenting crowns and scepters to the 2 homecoming “kings”, but we haven’t figured out exactly how we will work in safe sex promotion yet.

**Core Group meeting**

We are to go over M-groups Coordinator staff changes with the Core Group. I wonder what that will be like. We are going to discuss the various points of the Homecoming Dance... when/where to meet, who is bringing food/decorations in their car, who is responsible for signing new guys up.
**Coordinator staff meeting**

We’ll process what happened at the Core Group, and figure out where to go from there: Who is going to be on the M-groups recruiting committee? Probably David and Jorge. They have expressed the most interest. Who is going to MC the Homecoming Dance? Isaac wants to, but so does James and we want them to split it without getting their feelings hurt.

**M-group facilitation**

Jesse and I are meeting on Thursday afternoon (M-group is scheduled for Thursday night) to buy refreshments and set up the M-groups room. I’ll facilitate my heart out Thursday evening.

**Publicity**

I am supposed to make a short speech before the short film compilation “Boyeurism” at the Austin Gay/ Lesbian International Film Festival. AMP is sponsoring that movie for publicity / community support. I’ll bring flyers and AMP info with me and distribute that to the audience, and since I’ll be right there on the University campus, I’ll make some more flyer drops and put up a couple of posters.
Together creating community for friendship for health for life

mpowerment.org
The Center for AIDS Prevention Studies
University of California, San Francisco
50 Beale Street, Suite 1300
San Francisco, CA 94105
415.597.9306

Download a PDF of Module 4, Coordinators, at
Core Group & Other Volunteers

Objectives

To familiarize you with the decision-making body of the Project, the Core Group, as well as other volunteers who are not part of the Core Group. Both the Core Group and the non-Core Group volunteers are essential Core Elements of the Mpowerment Project.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module:

- Figure 5.1 Sample Core Group agendas for the first 4 meetings
- Figure 5.2 Sample Volunteer Interest Sheets
- Figure 5.3 Sample Icebreaker Exercises
- Figure 5.4 Facilitation Skills-Building Tips
- Figure 5.5 Brainstorming Skills-Building Tips
- Figure 5.6 Conflict Management Skills-Building Tips
- Figure 5.7 Sample Core Group Agendas for established Core Groups
- Figure 5.8 Sample Core Group Planning “Check List”
4 Main Ground Rules

- confidentiality
- use “I” statements
- mutual respect
- have fun!
Core Group members are volunteers, as are the other volunteers of the Project. Much of what is discussed in the second major section of this module, Volunteers, also pertains to Core Group members. Therefore, it will be helpful to read the section on Volunteers in order to get a more complete understanding of the Core Group.

The Core Group 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 gay/bisexual men, depending upon the size of the community (with fewer Core Group members in a smaller community, and more in a larger, more diverse community). The Core Group’s role is to:

- analyze the problems and dilemmas that young gay/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 Core Group is also a key part of the process of diffusing messages and norms about safer sex and HIV testing to social networks throughout the young gay/bisexual men’s community. In addition to HIV/AIDS, problems and dilemmas facing young men include where to meet other young men besides bars, the lack of safe places to socialize, a lack of community, challenges involved in having safer sex, how young gay/bisexual men treat each other, homophobia in the community and internalized homophobia by the young men themselves, how to maintain healthy boyfriend relationships, and so forth.
The Core Group analyzes if the Project goals and the goals of the activities are being met. The Core Group analyzes and considers the causes of these issues, and then it designs and implements activities that might be solutions. These solutions can involve developing Social Outreach Events (see Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Teams) and conducting safer sex promotional outreach. Possible solutions also include helping to ensure that M-groups are conducted, developing appealing and interesting safer sex materials, and developing and disseminating publicity materials for the Project. The Core Group analyzes if the Project goals and the goals of the activities are being met. For example, did a Social Outreach event attract diverse groups of young men and was safer sex promoted? Did it get men to think more about how to maintain healthy boyfriend relationships and how safer sex enters into such relationships? After reflecting on whether or not the goals of the event have been met, the Core Group then plans other activities and capitalizes on the lessons learned.

This approach of focusing on problems and dilemmas, and then striving to create solutions, is a key part of community organizing and empowerment. Organizing and creating a stronger, healthier young gay/bisexual men's community is a key goal of this Project. Importantly, successful community organizers focus on “winnable wins”—addressing problems that one can potentially change successfully, and this is also the approach used in the Mpowerment Project. Focusing on winnable wins gives the Core Group a sense of accomplishment and empowerment, as opposed to trying to address major social problems that are important but difficult to alter. Therefore, the Core Group tends to focus on concrete, local issues—while always keeping a focus on HIV prevention—rather than on issues that are more difficult to achieve, such as changing the laws of the country to support same-sex marriage. Men who want to focus on the larger issues are supported in their endeavors, but the Project tends to work on more achievable goals, while weaving HIV prevention into all activities.

Most of the Mpowerment Project’s Guiding Principles pertain to the Core Group. Two of its Guiding Principles are that the Project is peer run and peer designed, and that it empowers the young men involved in the Project. The Core Group meets both criteria because it makes important decisions about running the Project, and because it is directly involved with decision-making and continual analysis based on the Project’s goals. The Guiding Principle of diffusing the messages of HIV prevention throughout the young men’s community is achieved by ensuring that the Core Group has representatives from diverse social networks.

This module describes how to establish a Core Group, its purpose, and how its work helps to implement the Project’s Guiding Principles. As with all of the Mpowerment Project’s Core Elements, adaptations to the Core Group model should involve careful consideration of the Guiding Principles.
Assembling and renewing a Core Group

In order to have an Mpowerment Project that can reach broadly into diverse segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community, it is important that the Core Group’s composition reflects the Project’s target population. Every community has substantial diversity, with many subgroups or segments. An effective Core Group should strive to include many men from each of the major segments of young gay/bisexual men that exist in the community. Before assembling a Core Group for the first time, or when needing to renew a Core Group by attracting new members, the Coordinators should conduct a community assessment. This is one of the very first steps to start up the Project, but it is also helpful to do if the size of the Core Group needs to be increased. (See Module 2: Community Assessment for more information on the community assessment.)
Results from the community assessment will help guide the Coordinators in deciding who to recruit to the group. Diversity is a key consideration. Having a diverse Core Group ensures that the Project represents a broad variety of ideas and perspectives, and a diverse Core Group helps create a broad base of support for the Project within the community. As we state throughout this manual, diversity not only means men from different ethnic/racial groups, but also from diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, different social networks, and so forth.

In addition to considering diversity issues, it is also helpful to recruit young men into the Core Group who have leadership qualities, and who are popular within the different segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community. Men whose behavior and opinions influence other young men and who know many other young gay/bisexual men will be extremely helpful as Core Group members. Since the Core Group (including the Coordinators) is the starting point for the diffusion process (one of the Guiding Principles), it is helpful if its members are respected by others and have a number of friends to whom they can spread the messages of practicing safer sex, getting tested for HIV, and creating a supportive community. In addition, these men can endorse the Project, and tell other young men in the community that this is an exciting program, that its activities are interesting and trendy, and that it’s worth joining this community of young gay/bisexual men.

While it is important to have popular men as members of the Core Group, it is also important not to exclude anyone who wants to be a part of this group. More help is always needed, and excluding men will cause the Project to be perceived as cliquish.

Membership in the Core Group will change over time. Some men stay in the Core Group for a long time, while others leave after serving only briefly. It is not necessarily a problem if some men decide that they do not enjoy participating in the Core Group and therefore stop participating in it. Given the amount of time and reflection that is required of Core Group members, many men may decide they would rather volunteer in some other capacity. However, it is important for the Project Coordinators to understand the reasons why young men stop attending Core Group meetings, since these may provide helpful feedback to the Coordinators. For this reason, we recommend following up with former Core Group members to find out why they left the group and to get their suggestions for ways to improve the Project. New volunteers will need to be recruited on an ongoing basis to keep its membership between 12 and 20 men.
Motivations for joining the Core Group

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

First, a major motivation to participate in the Core Group 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 café 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, which translates into a willingness to commit their time to Project activities. It can be far more rewarding to work on a program when you have a strong voice in it than if you are only carrying out someone else’s decisions, or if you 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. 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.

Facilitating Core Group Meetings

The Coordinators typically facilitate Core Group meetings, although skilled volunteers may also fulfill this role or co-facilitate meetings. As described in Module 4: Coordinators, it is important for the Coordinators to have effective group facilitation skills. If they have never gone through group facilitation training, they should obtain such training as soon as possible after they are hired. (See Figure 5.4 in the Appendix to this module for facilitation skills-building tips.)
The Coordinators are both Core Group members and facilitators of the Core Group. When a Coordinator is acting in the role of facilitator, it is best if he tries to remain neutral on issues that are discussed by the group. For example, if a discussion is occurring about an upcoming event, the facilitator should not be interjecting his views about it. However, it is definitely appropriate for him to pose questions to the group to get them to think through the consequences of any actions they are considering taking. If a topic arises that a Coordinator wants to be able to contribute input to, it is best if he surrenders the role of facilitator to another Coordinator while he does so.

It is important for the Coordinators to have effective group facilitation skills.

Skills-building and shared M-group experience for Core Group members

Although there is no formal training or orientation for Core Group members, it is strongly recommended that all of them attend an M-group. If all Core Group members share the experience of participating in an M-group, then everyone on the Project starts at the same place in terms of their knowledge about many key elements of the Project: its goals, safer sex behavior and knowing one’s own HIV status, conducting informal outreach to friends, and an understanding of the link between building community and supporting friends to have safer sex.

When the M-group facilitators (the Project Coordinators) are first learning how to facilitate groups, they can conduct “practice groups” with Core Group members. This accomplishes two things: the Coordinators are able to get needed practice as group facilitators, and Core Group members experience being in an M-group. Thereafter, whenever someone is interested in joining the Core Group, they should be signed up for an M-group as soon as possible.
In addition, young men from economically or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds may need some additional support in order to assume a leadership role in the community. If the Core Group has many members who have never before participated in a “formal” group, it may be very helpful to provide a training in facilitation skills for the entire Core Group. Learning facilitation skills will make it easier for them to participate in Core Group meetings, and also to facilitate both the group and team or subcommittee meetings. In addition, Core Group members are likely to benefit from learning about approaches to conflict resolution, new computer skills (e.g., Word, Excel, graphic arts software), places they can go in the community to obtain a GED, and information on attending college and obtaining scholarships. As discussed in Module 11: Community Advisory Boards, the CAB may be able to attend some Core Group meetings and provide life skills trainings on such things as how to balance a checkbook, apply for a job, dress appropriately for a job interview, and keep a job.

**Teams**

Carrying out Project activities involves many tasks and details, and the Core Group can delegate these responsibilities to teams or committees of volunteers instead of trying to tackle every issue itself. For this reason, Projects have often formed the following teams:

**Outreach Team.** This team is in charge of coming up with a way to promote safer sex throughout the community and weave safer sex promotion into Project events.

**Social Outreach Events Team.** This team is in charge of planning all the Project’s large Social Outreach Events, as well as other Project activities.

During its meetings, the Core Group reviews and gives feedback on each team’s ideas and plans. For example, the Outreach Team may present to the Core Group their ideas about conducting outreach at an upcoming event. The Core Group then discusses their ideas and offers feedback. The Outreach Team then incorporates the Core Group’s suggestions into their plans and proceeds with the event. Likewise, if the Outreach Team is developing ideas for a safer sex promotional piece or an invitation to an outreach event, they also present these ideas to the Core Group. Following the Core Group’s feedback, the Outreach Team then produces the materials.

Often Core Group members will also be a member of a team, and this overlap provides useful continuity. This structure leaves the details to the individual teams, and allows the Core Group to focus on larger issues. By not having to worry about the details of events—which may not be of interest to everyone in the Core Group anyway—the Core Group is able to cover a number of different topics at each meeting. Typically teams will meet during the week, work on their tasks, present what they’ve done at the next Core Group meeting, and solicit feedback and ideas from the Core Group.
Core Group meetings

Frequency and location of Core Group meetings

Core Groups function most efficiently when they meet weekly. Evening meetings generally work best since many Core Group members are students or hold day jobs. Meetings are generally held at the Project space, the physical center where the Project holds most of its outreach events.

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). Some Projects hold potluck dinners where Core Group members bring dishes to share at the meetings. 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.

Mpowerment Project ground rules

The Project ground rules or agreements (see list below) are reviewed each time the Core Group meets, as well as at M-group meetings. They should also be displayed in the Mpowerment Project space. It is fine to rephrase them to make them more culturally appropriate to the group of men that the Project is targeting. At the beginning of each meeting, a Core Group member typically reviews the ground rules and describes what they mean to him. Coordinators can then add any points that the volunteer may have left out. The four main ground rules are:

- Confidentiality
- Use “I” statements
- Mutual respect
- Have fun!

“Confidentiality” means that private and sensitive information revealed during a meeting is not repeated outside of the meeting without permission from the person who shared it. Or paraphrasing this agreement, what is said in the room stays in the room. While the Core Group members are encouraged to tell people about the Project, they should not share anyone’s personal information with others. This is important to emphasize
at every meeting because many men are concerned that their “business” will be shared with others.

**“Use ‘I’ statements”** means that each Core Group member discusses what he feels about a topic, rather than speaking in general terms about what most people think or trying to impose his values and opinions on someone else. Core Group members should be encouraged to use statements like “I think” or “I feel” when communicating their opinions.

**“Mutual respect”** means listening to others in a respectful manner, regardless of whether one agrees with their views or not. It is natural to disagree sometimes, especially given that Core Group members come from different backgrounds and have different life experiences. However, all points of view are valid. By respecting others, this creates a safe environment so Core Group members feel comfortable expressing differing opinions. Being mutually respectful also means not talking while others are talking.

**“Have fun!”** means that the Project’s activities should be fun and enjoyable. The work we are doing is important, but be careful not to become overly serious while doing it.

**Socializing before and/or after Core Group meetings**

Scheduling a half-hour of time for socializing before the Core Group gets started creates a relaxed atmosphere and a sense of community. Playing music definitely creates an upbeat mood. The socializing can be considered the period of time when the meeting is advertised as beginning until the time the meeting is actually called to order. This period of time also allows leeway for travel time, the inevitable straggling member, last minute errands, etc.

During this time it is important for the Coordinators to welcome each person who shows up to the meeting and mix with all the men (which means that any preparations for the Core Group meeting should be done prior to this). The Coordinators can express their appreciation for the Core Group members coming to the meeting, talk to the new people, catch up with the regulars, introduce them to each other, and sparkle and be charming. This is also an excellent way for new volunteers to get involved. Two or three Core Group members can form a welcoming committee to make sure that new people get introduced around. Be sure to ask new men how they heard about the Project and keep notes on this, as the information may guide future outreach efforts.

After accomplishing the business of the meeting, many men like to continue socializing for a while afterwards. This unstructured social time is important for team building among the Core Group members. It relates to the Guiding Principle of developing a stronger and healthier community as young gay/bisexual men create larger social networks of friends who support each other about having safer sex and knowing their HIV status. It also relates to the
Guiding Principle of meeting young gay/bisexual men’s social needs. In fact, the socializing aspect of Core Group meetings is often a bigger motivation for participating than the “business” aspect of the meeting. Turning music back on after the meeting lets everyone know that the meeting is officially over, and it also creates a relaxed, fun, and social atmosphere during which Coordinators can circulate through the group to make sure that no one feels isolated or left out. Having people stay and socialize after the meeting provides opportunities for:

- Core Group members to get to know each other better and develop friendships
- Conducting informal outreach by encouraging each other to be safe sexually, to get tested, and to support peers in doing both
- Men to talk to the Coordinators
- Recruiting men for M-groups
- Making referrals to other services
- It also provides a chance for those men who missed the social time before the meeting to meet and talk with the other Core Group members

Occasionally some men only attend the Core Group to socialize and do not necessarily enjoy or contribute to the Core Group activities. These men should be encouraged to attend other Mpowerment Project activities instead, such as the weekly video nights or discussion groups, or simply to come to the Project space after the Core Group meetings have ended.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of having music playing when men arrive for Core Group meetings. As mentioned before, people often feel more comfortable and relaxed when they are in a space with music playing. Having
music playing also improves the atmosphere by making the inevitable lulls in conversation less ominous. Play fun, popular music that young guys listen to. Taking over the choice of music before and after Core Group meetings also provides an opportunity for a music-savvy Core Group member to get more involved.

**Take Minutes at the meeting**  
At each Core Group meeting ask someone to take minutes. This can be a job that a volunteer routinely takes on. Typing the minutes directly into a laptop computer facilitates emailing them out to the Core Group or posting them to the Project’s website, and to its pages on websites such as Facebook and MySpace. It also eliminates the need to type them out afterwards. Including the date in the file title is helpful for easy record keeping (but don’t forget to also include the year of the meeting). A complete copy of the minutes should be filed in the Project office after the meeting.

**Preparing for Core Group meetings and developing a preliminary agenda**

**The importance of planning the meeting**  
Having productive and well functioning meetings is one of the keys to a successful Core Group, and preparing for good meetings is simple and doesn’t take much time. No one wants to come to meetings that are dry and boring—not even Coordinators. Meetings that are disorganized and unproductive are also a major source of frustration to Core Group members, who are volunteering their valuable time to the Project. One agency we worked with watched its Core Group die after many weeks of pointless discussion about creating bylaws. Tasks that don’t contribute to community-building and a sense of fun can frustrate members and can lead to the group’s failure. The easiest way to avoid these common pitfalls is to make sure that meetings are well planned. Below are the steps we’ve seen used to great success in Mpowerment Projects.

**Meet beforehand to plan the meeting**  
We strongly suggest that the Coordinators meet before the Core Group meeting to create a preliminary agenda. Setting a preliminary agenda rather than a final one embodies the Project’s guiding principle to empower participants by giving them a voice in planning. At the beginning of each meeting, the Core Group is then given the opportunity to revise and approve the final agenda. If a Project has only one Coordinator, then it is recommended he meet either with the Project Supervisor or with one or more key Core Group members to get input on the preliminary agenda.

Including Core Group members in the planning of meetings helps volunteers feel they have a vital role in decisions made about the Project. In planning for the Core Group meeting, it’s a good idea to review minutes from the last meeting to see if there are any important details that need following up. (See
During planning for the Core Group meeting, it’s a good idea to review minutes from the last meeting to see if there are any important details that need following up.

**Items to include on the agenda**

Sometimes running the Mpowerment Project can seem like a juggling act that requires keeping many balls in the air simultaneously, and this fact impacts the agenda. Trying to focus on many issues simultaneously sometimes results in Core Group meetings that feel more like staff meetings than a vital component of empowerment and community-building. The goal of Core Group meetings is not just to have volunteers give status reports on the work they’ve been doing, to assign tasks, or to think of more work for everyone to do! While these are all important tasks, it’s best to avoid letting them dominate Core Group meetings. Instead, we recommend that Core Group members spend time at the beginning of every meeting working together on a team building exercise—something that will help everyone get to know each other just a little bit better. (See Figure 5.3. in the Appendix to this module for a list of sample icebreaker exercises.)

It is important to review the ground rules at every Core Group meeting. MPower in Albuquerque started every meeting with an icebreaker and a special review of the ground rules, after which they would light a candle. This symbolically reinforced the idea of observing the ground rules during the Core Group meeting.

Spending time reflecting on the overall functioning of the Project is of critical importance, as is a review of each of the Core Elements. For example, periodically it is helpful to devote time during the meetings to discuss how informal outreach is progressing among the men attending Core Group so that they continue to support each other to have safer sex and to know their current HIV status. Another extremely valuable agenda item is to revisit the issue of why local young gay/bisexual men are still having unprotected sex, and how the Project can best address this problem. Discussing this topic at least a few times a year will help to ensure that the Project is staying relevant to the HIV prevention needs of its target population. Including an agenda item every few meetings about recruitment for M-groups is also extremely important, since the Core Group can be instrumental in finding new ways to attract young men to these groups.
In addition to the agenda items discussed above, other topics that may need regular attention include:

- Brainstorming upcoming events
- Analyzing previous events
- Recognizing and appreciating volunteers
- Generating ideas for future discussion groups
- Implementing publicity plans
- Producing and disseminating safer-sex written materials
- Recruiting new members to the Core Group, the Outreach Teams or the M-group Team
- Providing refreshments at events
- Creating next month's calendar
- Cleaning the Project space
- Maintaining a database of participant information
- Following up with new names collected at events (e.g., to invite men to an M-group)
- Operating a website

During planning for the Core Group meeting, it’s a good idea to review minutes from the last meeting to see if there are any important details that need following up.

For Coordinators, planning the agenda and being mentally prepared for the Core Group meeting is half the task—the other half is preparing the Project space for the meeting. Here are some suggestions for pre-meeting tasks:

- Clean the meeting area, sweep or vacuum the floor, pick up trash, etc.
- Refill condom bowls in the main area and in the bathroom
- Make sure the Ground Rules and calendar are posted, food or snacks are out and ready, and that music is playing in the background
- Have flip charts and markers ready
- Copy any handouts that are to be distributed

Devoting 30 minutes before the Group convenes (and before the socializing time begins) to whip the space into shape can make a huge difference in how the meetings run. If the Coordinators are running around trying to get things set up while the Core Group men are socializing, this detracts from the upbeat mood. But when all preparations are completed before the first men arrive, then the Coordinators can spend their time socializing with Core Group members, meeting new people, making introductions, and in general making everyone feel comfortable. The Coordinators can also ask a couple of volunteers to show up 15 minutes early every week to help them with last minute details. So, we strongly recommend that the Coordinators check during planning for the Core Group meeting, it’s a good idea to review minutes from the last meeting to see if there are any important details that need following up.
e-mails and finish up any paperwork before men come to the house. Again, the goal is to create a warm, welcoming, friendly environment. That may be difficult to do if the Coordinators are preoccupied with last minute tasks. (See Figure 5.8 in the Appendix to this module for a sample Core Group planning checklist that can be helpful to use before each meeting.)

**Conducting Core Group meetings**

An effective way to organize Core Group meetings is to spend about 15-30 minutes on introductions and team-building, 60 minutes on Project-related work, and 30-45 minutes discussing broader, topical issues.

At times, and particularly just before a large event, a part of the meeting can also be spent breaking into smaller groups or teams to complete urgent tasks related to the event. For instance, the Materials Team may need to finish producing a flyer in order to meet an approaching deadline, or the Outreach Team needs to make final arrangements to go to community venues to publicize an upcoming event. Alternately, a Coordinator can suggest that the volunteers get together right after the meeting to complete work on the task.

**Starting the meeting**

We recommend that Core Group meetings begin with the Coordinators asking everyone to come together. People can grab anything they want to eat or drink as they sit down. At this point, the music is turned off, and the Coordinators welcome everyone and thank them for attending the Core Group meeting.

**Introduction of coordinators**

Coordinators then introduce themselves and give a quick overview of the Project. For example, in Austin Coordinators started each Core Group meeting by reminding members that the Project is a community-building and HIV prevention program for gay/bisexual men ages 18-29. It’s also helpful to explain the Coordinator’s role in the Core Group and the Core Group’s role in the Project. For example, in Albuquerque the Coordinators typically explain that while they are the
Coordinators of the Project, they are also part of the Core Group. Doing so reminds participants that all Core Group members—including the Coordinators—have equal status in the group.

**Discussing the ground rules** Typically a Core Group member then states the ground rules for the meeting, in his own words. A Coordinator can add additional points that aren’t covered by the volunteer.

**Introductions and icebreakers** Since not everyone may know each other (or remember each other’s names), it is helpful to have introductions. Rather than simply having people go around the room and state their names, it is more personal and enjoyable to ask each man to answer a simple question, such as “What is your favorite way to relax?”, “What entertainer do you really like?”, or “If you could have a date with any celebrity, who would you choose?” Such exercises help break the ice, are fun, and provide a way for Core Group to build trust and mutual understanding. Many Projects have decided to incorporate an icebreaker exercise into the start of every Core Group meeting as a way of setting a positive tone and getting to know members better. In fact, we have noticed that even though Core Group members sometimes balk at doing “corny” exercises, meetings beginning with a team-building exercise often have less conflict and are easier to facilitate than meetings without such exercises. Core Group members can also come up with their own icebreaker each week, and facilitation of the icebreaker can be done either by a Coordinator or a Core Group member. (*See Figure 5.3 in the Appendix to this module for a list of sample icebreaker exercises.*)

**Review the previous week’s minutes** Briefly go over the minutes of the last meeting to bring people up-to-date. Remember to keep it fun. The facilitator might try to make a joke, or recall something humorous from the previous meeting. It is important that whoever facilitates the meeting not come across as stiff and formal, since that is likely to make meetings feel boring and impersonal.
The facilitator then moves the group to the issues at hand: planning and carrying out activities, and analyzing the success of previous activities. It is helpful to present the preliminary agenda at this point, either on a dry-erase board or a flip chart, and ask the Core Group if there are any additional items they wish to add. Oftentimes the group’s business agenda will include brainstorming ideas for the next Social Outreach Event, making decisions about the event, assembling committees to work on it, or evaluating how an event went. Before the group moves on to a new topic, the facilitator can help members decide what the next steps are and together develop a timeline for accomplishing them.

Each Coordinator or team leader/volunteer presents his team’s progress and solicits Core Group input. When a Project is in the middle of planning a large event (like a dance party), each person in charge of a certain task is asked to report on his progress. The volunteer who is coordinating decoration, for example, talks about where that team is in the planning process. The Coordinator in charge of safer sex promotional materials might show draft materials to the group for input or approval. The Outreach Team leader talks about his team’s plans to promote safer sex during the event. This can include discussions of the most recent outreach efforts, goals for the planning of events, M-groups recruitment status, etc. One way to deal with all the work of the Project is to break into teams and have each one report back to the Core Group about their work or activities. (See Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Teams for more information on what issues to address when planning Social Outreach Events.)

Reviewing the current calendar by pointing out upcoming activities can help to encourage Core Group members to attend future events. Reviewing the calendar also provides an opportunity to publicize each event and serves as a reminder to volunteers to remember to invite their friends. Time might also be taken to plan the next month’s calendar.

Discussion of HIV/AIDS, the community and other issues

In addition to addressing business-related issues, some portion of each Core Group meeting needs to be devoted to HIV prevention-related issues. Some suggested topics include informal outreach (e.g., discussing how informal outreach is going, encouraging members to talk to their friends about safer sex, addressing barriers to informal outreach); check-ins on what’s happening in the community regarding safer sex (e.g., what people are doing, what the community norms are); drug and/or alcohol use and their relationships to safer sex; discussions about HIV testing (where are people getting tested, with what regularity); an update on HIV in the community; and collaborations with other organizations.

Parking lot

While running the meeting, sometimes topics are raised that are not relevant to the immediate task or issue being discussed. The “parking lot” is a list of unfinished issues or ideas raised by the Core Group that weren’t immediately addressed. Sometimes these topics come up when the group doesn’t have time to address them, or they may be related to an
entirely different discussion, or they just may not fit into the context of the current conversation. For example, suppose the group is discussing an upcoming event, and then someone suggests another event he thinks the Project might be interested in. That proposed event would then be put in a parking lot at the end of the agenda to be discussed in greater detail after everything else on the agenda had been taken care of.

The parking lot is a useful tool that helps manage distractions from the task at hand while ensuring that topics don’t get lost. It is also a good place to put event ideas, workshop suggestions, and other information that gradually become part of an ongoing list of “parking lot items.” The entire parking lot list does not need to be covered at each meeting, and due to time limitations never could be. The Core Group gets to decide what parking lot items they want to tackle at each meeting. The important thing is not to forget about what’s on the list, otherwise it will end up as a “garbage can” instead of a “parking lot!”

**Announcements**

Many Core Groups take the opportunity at the end of each meeting to make any relevant announcements. These can be announcements about birthdays, holidays, new events or openings around town, fun things to do, where everyone is going to dinner that night, or anything else that doesn’t require much discussion.

It is also helpful to talk about other events of interest in the community. Examples might be an upcoming gay pride festival, a film festival, the opening of a new coffee shop, or volunteer opportunities at local agencies and fundraisers. Encouraging participants to attend other activities can help them feel like they are part of a larger community, and when young men from the Project attend other events, they can also act as its ambassadors.

**Formally end each meeting**

Formally end each Core Group meeting by thanking everyone for coming and participating in the meeting, and invite them to stick around and socialize. As discussed earlier, the socializing time can provide a nice opportunity for newcomers to meet other guys and to find out more about getting involved in the Project. This informal socializing time can help build community by providing opportunities for the participants to have fun and find support.
Initial Core Group meetings

Once a group of potential Core Group members has been identified, it is helpful to invite them to an informational meeting about the Project. At this meeting the Coordinators introduce themselves, describe their vision for the Project, and present its general framework. The goals of this first meeting are threefold:

- To inform potential Core Group members about the Project
- To inspire them to become involved
- To invite them to join the Core Group

Creating an enjoyable, uplifting, and sociable atmosphere for the meeting is essential. Having music playing in the Project space when men arrive helps create a welcoming and relaxed environment. Providing refreshments (typically a whole meal for the first few meetings) and an opportunity for the men to mingle and socialize also helps to set a pleasant tone for the meeting. (See Figure 5.1 in the Appendix to this module for copies of agendas used by the Albuquerque Project for the initial four Core Group meetings. See Figure 5.7 in the Appendix to this module for additional sample Core Group agendas.) Remember that it is most effective to describe the Project as a community-building program that also focuses on HIV prevention. The social aspects of the program should be emphasized at this meeting since many young men are not intrigued about being part of an HIV prevention effort, but do want to be a part of a program that focuses on community-building and includes social activities. Of course HIV prevention, and the fact that HIV is impacting so many young men’s lives, are important topics to address. However, also discuss the broader issues facing young men. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Coordinators should ask the men to let them know if they are interested in being on the Core Group, and set a time for the next meeting.
A useful exercise for one of the first meetings is to brainstorm and discuss the problems and dilemmas that young gay/bisexual men face. Often these issues will include where to meet other young men besides bars, the lack of places to socialize, the lack of community, AIDS/HIV, safer sex, and cattiness among young gay/bisexual men. It is important to give the Core Group members adequate time to share their feelings about these salient issues. This exercise helps motivate the men for the next activity, which is to brainstorm some activities for the Project to sponsor that would address the various problems they identified. Some activities that have been organized include video nights, dance parties, balls, open-houses, barbeques, picnics, J-setting, retreats, voguing nights, outings, games nights, basketball, football, roller-blading groups, reading groups, volleyball games, group discussions, political actions, and workshops or forums on various issues ranging from boyfriends to how to do drag. Maintaining an optimistic and uplifting tone at these initial meetings will help Core Group members feel inspired to take action. Future meetings can then focus more concretely on issues to address, as well as activities the Project might want to initiate, and how to integrate HIV prevention into all these activities.
Evaluating the Core Group meetings

Meet the day after to debrief about the Core Group meeting. It’s very helpful to set aside some time on the day following each Core Group meeting for the Coordinators to meet with each other, or to meet with the Project Supervisor. This is the time to analyze how the Core Group meeting went, to decide how it could be improved, and to identify all the tasks that need to be accomplished during the upcoming week to make sure every detail is covered. It is always important to review the process that occurred during the Core Group in order to analyze if there was tension or conflict in the group, if good decision-making processes were followed, and if the Coordinators have any concerns about what occurred in the meeting or with each others’ facilitation.

In addition, of course, the Coordinators need to think through the implications of the decisions made and the team reports, and how these further the Project’s goals. The Core Group planning checklist in Figure 5.8 in the Appendix to this module can be used for this purpose. The issues and tasks that arise can then be put into the Coordinators’ behavioral objectives (See Module 4: Coordinators for more information on behavioral objectives).

Points to cover are:

- What tasks must be accomplished, when, and by whom?
- How can volunteers be incorporated into those processes?
- Who will follow up with the volunteers?

Complete required evaluation forms

One tip to successful program evaluation is to complete any required report forms as soon as possible after every activity. Core Group attendance/demographics and topics discussed can be recorded on the Mpowerment Project evaluation forms (see Module 12: Evaluation, Figure 12.6: Core Group Evaluation and Planning Form) or on other forms that the funder requires.

Discuss Core Group meeting with the Project Supervisor

If possible, it is helpful to receive feedback from the Project Supervisor after each Core Group meeting in order to discuss how it went, what was accomplished, and what was planned to address during the meeting. If a supervision meeting doesn’t occur, it may be possible to set up a phone call,
a regular e-mail report, or a voicemail report with the Project Supervisor. Ideally at the same time, the Coordinators also share their behavioral objectives with the Project Supervisor, since these are closely related to what occurs and what decisions are made at the Core Group meeting. Coordinators can also share their behavioral objectives with each other, and this can be a great tool for processing and evaluating the Core Group. The Core Group checklist in Figure 5.8 can be used as a reference tool here as well.

**Monitoring the Core Group**

**Role of Coordinators**

Although all members of the Core Group—including the Coordinators—have an equal voice in decision-making, at the start of the Project the Coordinators will have the clearest understanding of the Project’s goals, objectives, and methods. Hence, it is important for the Coordinators to provide guidance to the Core Group as they make plans or deliberate about decisions. The Coordinators should pose questions to the Core Group so that they reflect on whether the activities are advancing the larger goals for the Project, namely 1) whether young men are becoming empowered, 2) if a strong and healthy young gay/bisexual men’s community is developing, 3) if word about the Project is spreading throughout the community, and 4) if young men are having conversations about safer sex with their peers? Below are a few examples of specific questions Coordinators can pose to the Core Group to get them to think about the larger goals for the Project.

- If we put on this outreach event, will we effectively reach all the different groups of young gay/bisexual men we’re trying to reach in our community?
- Do we need to have an event that will reach a particular segment of the community that we haven’t yet reached?
- If we choose this name for the Project, will we risk alienating any groups?
- If we have this much disagreement about a decision, perhaps we need to back up and reconsider the source of our differing opinions.
- Will doing this activity help guys to think more deeply about [issue]?
- Are we addressing HIV prevention issues in various ways in this event?
The Coordinator’s role is to help the Core Group keep on track by encouraging members to reflect on their roles and decisions. It is not the role of the Coordinators to tell the group exactly what to do or to point out mistakes, at least not overtly. Using a “reflective” approach is more likely to foster a sense of empowerment and to build strong decision-making skills among Project volunteers as they think through what they are doing and why they are doing it, than is a directive approach.

It’s important for Coordinators to know if things are or are not getting done. The Coordinators need to monitor if Core Group members, subcommittees, and teams are doing their work. When Core Group members volunteer to do something, it’s a good idea for the Coordinators to follow up with them in a timely fashion to check on progress. Sometimes Coordinators and volunteers have different understandings about what everyone agreed to do, and a quick phone call or e-mail can help correct these situations. Additionally, volunteers have a lot going on in their lives and they may need some gentle reminders about getting their work done for the Project. Occasionally a task that a volunteer agreed to do turns out to require more time or is harder to accomplish than was first envisioned. If the Coordinators don’t check in with volunteers about their progress, the delay in getting the task accomplished may not be apparent until it’s too late to redistribute the workload or find another solution.

**Role of Project Supervisor**

The agency Project Supervisor can play a critical advisory role to the Core Group, especially during its first few months. It is highly recommended that Project Supervisors attend all Core Group meetings for the first month, and then every other meeting for an additional two or three months. After this, attendance once every few months usually works well. During the meetings, he or she can model ways of getting the Core Group to reflect and work together cooperatively. The Project Supervisor’s presence also supports the Coordinators, who are usually less experienced at group facilitation. (See Module 3: Implementing Agency for more information about supervising the Mpowerment Project.)

Core Group members are likely to be unclear about Project goals and objectives in the beginning, and this lack of clarity will carry over into their decision-making. At a couple of study Project sites, for example, Core Group members initially thought they should conduct outreach on HIV prevention at high schools. Project organizers had to point out the statistics of HIV infection among young gay/bisexual men and explain that the Project was funded specifically to target young adults (18-
Events that the Core Group sponsors should be those that all members can get behind. The Project Supervisor’s presence at meetings during the first few months of a newly formed Core Group can help ensure that this happens. As a case in point, one Core Group decided it would hold an event called an “anti-Madonna” party even though the idea was offensive to several of the Core Group members. At the meeting, the Project Supervisor reminded members that one of the main objectives of the Mpowerment Project is to build a supportive community. He then asked whether the event they were planning would contribute to this goal if the theme was creating deep divisions within the Core Group. The Project Supervisor’s presence and involvement helped the group reflect on their decision. The Core Group members were then able to see the larger issue, and unanimously decided to change the party’s theme.

Parameters of Core Group decision-making power

Although the Core Group is invested with considerable decision-making authority, it does operate within certain parameters. For example, since the first Mpowerment Projects were funded through the University of California, which does not allow alcohol at university events, alcohol could not be served at outreach events. Likewise, to avoid problems with funders (and their reputation in the community), sexual activity is not allowed at the outreach performances or at the Project space. It is important to make such parameters known to the Core Group right from the start. Establishing parameters builds trust and understanding between the Core Group, the Coordinators, and the Project Supervisor. If parameters are not set up and clearly stated at the outset, if the Core Group is suddenly told at some later point “you’re not allowed to do that,” it can undermine their belief in their decision-making power. At the same time, it is important at the beginning of a Project not to establish too many rules about what the Core Group can and cannot do.

The Project Supervisor and Coordinators are more knowledgeable about the Project’s budget than is the Core Group, which is why they make most of the budget decisions. However, once the Core Group has gained some knowledge about the Project’s methods and goals and some experience in carrying out
activities, it can be given a budget for specific activities such as an outreach event and allowed to decide how to allocate the resources.

Certain limits also exist in selecting a Project name for each site. Since research has shown that most young gay/bisexual men are not attracted to programs that focus solely on HIV/AIDS, the Mpowerment Project organizers have specified that the following words not be part of the program name: “AIDS,” “HIV,” “education,” or “health.” In addition, in order not to scare off men who are not completely out about their sexuality, the program name should not include the words “gay” or “queer.”

**Common challenges Core Groups face**

Since the Core Group is the decision-making body for the program, it is extremely important that they make the best decisions possible. A number of obstacles to good decision-making can arise.

**Impediments to good decision-making**

Making well thought-out decisions sometimes takes a substantial amount of time. It requires carefully weighing the positive and negative aspects of the decision, and often involves soliciting input from others outside of the Core Group. On occasion the Core Group begins to tire of the slow deliberations required to make good decisions. In a desire to get something accomplished in a short time, or because members may become impatient with always having to weigh decisions, insufficient thought and time may be spent on planning events. This can result in the group producing events that are poorly executed or poorly attended (as, for example if it forgot to include HIV prevention components or neglected to sufficiently publicize the event). Besides being demoralizing for the Core Group and Project volunteers, inadequate planning also creates a negative image of the Project in the young gay/bisexual men’s community.

In addition, some Core Group members may be quite attached to their own opinions, which can result in their not listening fully to other’s opinions or respecting what they have to say. This may result in divisiveness, in which case the decision-making process becomes quite difficult.

**Solutions**

The most effective solution to these and other decision-making problems is to put things into perspective by reminding the group of “the big picture.” Help group members determine where the decision fits within the Project’s broader goals of building community and preventing young gay/bisexual men from becoming infected with HIV. Also, remind Core Group members that taking the time together to review and reflect upon their decision-making process—or essentially how they treat one another
During group deliberations—is as important as reaching a good decision, because it also contributes to a stronger sense of community.

Another effective approach is to divide the decision-making process into stages. For example, a number of sites have followed a two-stage process in deciding upon a name for the Mpowerment Project. During an initial brainstorming session, Core Group members jot down a variety of names for the Project and discuss the pros and cons of each. (See Figure 5.5 in the Appendix to this module for skills-building tips on brainstorming.) Then they can select the top 10 ideas and “test market” them with young men in the community to solicit their reactions. At the next Core Group meeting, members can report back to the group on what they found out. By using this information gathering process, the Core Group now has additional input and can base their decision on something more concrete than the Core Group members’ personal opinions. This approach can be used whenever a very important decision is being made (such as selecting a theme for a major event), and it requires only a little more time to make the optimal choice.

In addition, having the group prepare a detailed timeline and task assignments will also reduce the likelihood of producing events that are poorly planned and executed. (See Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Teams.)

Occasionally a Core Group member decides that he finds the slow, deliberate process of decision-making to be quite unpleasant. Such an individual might find it preferable to volunteer on a team where he can work on more immediate activities, such as organizing a volleyball tournament or participating with outreach in the bars.

Consensus Versus majority rule

A natural question that arises is whether the Core Group makes decisions through consensus or majority rule. Striving to reach total agreement on every issue is cumbersome and can sometimes result in a decision never being made. When decisions are made by majority rule, however, a decision can be reached that leaves slightly less than half of the group feeling frustrated. It is always preferable to strive for general agreement on a subject. In order for the Project to succeed, it is important for the Core Group to carefully consider all its decisions. All Core Group members should have the opportunity to fully express their thinking on each subject, with all others carefully and respectfully listening to their peers’ thoughts.

Sometimes the Coordinators may suggest that a decision be put off until Core Group members have had a chance to ask their friends for their input on the topic, as in the example described above regarding selecting a name for the Project. At a future meeting, the topic can be discussed again. At such moments it is valuable to remind Core Group members about the importance of respecting a diversity of opinions during the decision-making process. This type of sensitivity helps to develop a supportive community that embraces diversity in all its forms.
It can also be very helpful to remind everyone of the Project’s ground rules, including respecting the diversity of opinions and being respectful of each other. This is especially true when conversations get too “heated” or personal.

**Becoming a clique** Occasionally the Core Group becomes cliquish. This is understandable since its members meet weekly, discuss issues and carry out activities, and end up spending a considerable amount of time together. However, if the Core Group becomes too cliquish and is not welcoming of newcomers, then this problem needs to be addressed. In such situations, the Core Group may need to be reminded of the community-building goals of the Project and of the need to attract and welcome new participants. Publicizing Project events broadly gives all young men in the community the opportunity to attend, and at the events, let men know that they are welcome to come to the Core Group. It’s important that young gay/bisexual men in the community know that Core Group meetings are open to all, including newcomers. At every Core Group meeting, make sure to greet all newcomers and introduce them to current volunteers as well as other newcomers to the Core Group.

**Core Group Adaptations**

**Restricting Core Group membership** We have observed some adaptations by community-based organizations to Core Groups that are noteworthy. One adaptation was enacted by Mpowerment Detroit, and involved the creation of a Core Group that members joined by way of an internship process. They called their Core Group the Young Brothers United, or YBU (an acronym that also posed the important question, “Why Be You?”). In order to become a YBU member, guys had to apply and then meet a number of different requirements. The interns had to do a predetermined amount of volunteering and facilitation of groups and events over the course of the year in order to “graduate” to YBU membership. They also had to complete a specified number of hours conducting outreach and training on topics such as effective group facilitation, and effective outreach and event planning. Applications for the YBU were accepted once a year. After the interns had taken on significant responsibility and had proved themselves to be committed to helping their community as well as bettering themselves (for example, completing a GED, enrolling in a local college), they were allowed to become YBU members.

The Project Supervisor of Mpowerment Detroit understood that the added hierarchical structure wasn’t as fluid as in the original design because it limited inclusion in the Core Group—not everyone could join when they wanted. However, the guys themselves pushed for this structure as a way to protect the reputation of the group. The participants felt that the additional requirements would act as a buffer and protect the group from drama. They wanted to weed out guys who said they wanted to join but in reality didn’t want to do the work. For those who remained interested (and there were many), the YBU structure gave them something to work towards and provided them with tangible achievements they could reflect
on with pride. They even instituted an “Executive Core Group” for long standing YBU members in order to build in an additional layer of goal setting structure. Although this may sound very hierarchical, and quite different from the typical Mpowerment Project, eventually joining the Executive Core Group was a goal that young men could achieve if they put in the time and commitment to the Project.

Mpowerment Detroit’s adaptation to the Core Group retains fidelity to the original intervention’s design because:

- it continued the principles of being an empowering experience for young men
- it was run by and for young men themselves
- they continued to seek Core Group members from diverse parts of the community so that diffusion would occur

This adaptation could be challenging for some Mpowerment Projects, however, because it creates additional monitoring and record keeping in order to confirm that the stated requirements are being met. Additionally, this structure is unlikely to work at the start of a Project because prospective Core Group members may not see the benefits of aspiring to be on the Core Group. Indeed, for Mpowerment Detroit, the YBU structure evolved over time. Thus, Projects that choose to design their Core Group in this way should only do so after a program has been in operation for a while.

**Paying Core Group members**

Another adaptation that we have seen in several Mpowerment Projects is to pay Core Group members a small stipend. The rationale behind this practice is that young men from economically disadvantaged backgrounds gain self-esteem by being paid something for their time. Additionally, they are more willing to participate in the Core Group if they are compensated for their time since they desperately need financial help, sometimes simply to cover the costs of transportation to and from the meetings.

Although we recognize these benefits, we also believe that there are downsides to paying Core Group members that should be considered. One issue is the importance of having diverse men join the Core Group. Providing stipends may limit how many men can be part of the group due to budgetary constraints. It could also be problematic to have both paid and unpaid Core Group members, since men who are not paid may not want to participate. This might result in a Core Group that doesn’t change over time, which may limit expansion into diverse social networks.

A second problem that may arise is that Core Group members may feel they only need to work on the Project when they are being paid, when in fact their efforts will be needed for more activities than the Core Group meetings alone. However, there are ways to address this issue. For example, Core Group members could be reimbursed for their transportation expenses at least part of the time, since it is unlikely a Project could afford to pay all transportation costs for everyone in the Project.
An alternative to paying each Core Group member a stipend could be holding a lottery at each meeting. Those in attendance would get to participate in the lottery for a chance at being paid for the following week. Such a system would not discourage new members from joining the Core Group, since they would have as much of a chance of winning as long-time members.

Increasing non-monetary incentives for participating in the Core Group is yet another option, especially those that are likely to increase community-building such as taking active Core Group members out to dinner, on retreats, or on camping trips. Rather than paying Core Group members to attend meetings, Projects might also explore ways to compensate members for specific tasks (e.g., recruiting new men into M-groups, designing a flyer, distributing flyers throughout the community).

Limiting voting rights for new Core Group attendees

Another adaptation we have seen relates to voting by Core Group members. The Core Group, as it was originally designed, allowed anyone to vote when they attended a meeting, even if they hadn’t attended an M-group or Core Group before. Many Projects have found this to be frustrating, because new members were allowed to vote even though they did not necessarily have a full grasp of the Project goals and Core Elements. Sometimes a Core Group had been working on developing an event over several meetings, and a new person would suddenly show up at a meeting and try to change the direction of the planning.

For these reasons, a number of Projects have added the rule that individuals cannot be voting members of the Core Group until they have attended a certain number of meetings (often three are required) and have attended an M-group. As Mpowerment Detroit’s adaptation illustrated, other Projects have felt that one needs to “earn” a place at the table by developing leadership skills and showing the ability to follow through on responsibilities. We think that these adaptations make a lot of sense when they translate into having a more functional Core Group. At the same time, it is always important to keep in mind the Mpowerment Project’s Guiding Principle of the diffusion of HIV prevention messages into diverse segments of the community. Therefore, it is not desirable to create barriers for new men to join the Core Group, since they often represent new social networks. Thus, if a Project decides to add requirements for becoming a voting Core Group member, they should be reasonable.
Volunteerism

Volunteerism is at the very heart of the Mpowerment Project. The Project can only succeed if numerous young men volunteer their time and talents to its day-to-day operations. Not only do volunteers do most of the work that keeps the Project running, but they also become powerful agents of change in their diverse communities. A relatively small staff can accomplish a tremendous amount by effectively mobilizing a large, diverse, and dynamic volunteer base. For example, the Mpowerment Project in Eugene, OR operated with four part-time staff, but they recruited, trained, and supported over 100 young gay/bisexual men who volunteered in the Project, either as Core Group members or guys who helped out for a single event.

It does not matter how much or how little time someone can spare. There is a role for every young gay/bisexual man in the Mpowerment Project. The most important thing is to involve as many men as possible. This is because everyone who volunteers comes into contact with the Project’s norms and philosophy. That philosophy stresses the importance of consistently having safer sex, getting tested regularly for HIV, and being part of a community whose members actively support each other. As such, each young gay/bisexual man who gets involved with the Project becomes a potential “change agent” who then takes this message back to his networks or social circles, thus attracting more people into the Project. The Project calls this phenomenon its “diffusion process,” and this is one of the Mpowerment Project’s Guiding Principles. Although many volunteers never engage in any
type of formal outreach at bars or at community events, this does not affect the Project’s effectiveness in any way. Anyone who participates is likely to contribute to the Project’s outreach simply by sharing information about it with their friends.

Another reason to have as many volunteers as possible is because by volunteering, the men feel a part of the community that the Project is seeking to build. This is another Guiding Principle of the Project, building a community of young gay/bisexual men who support each other in practicing safer sex and getting tested regularly. Thus, having more volunteers means having a larger community, and this in itself can attract more men to the Project.

**Supporting volunteerism**

It is critical that Project Coordinators know the essentials of working effectively with volunteers. Specifically, it is helpful for the Coordinators to attend to the following areas on an ongoing basis:

- Encouraging and valuing the contributions of volunteers
- Making certain that volunteers receive careful training and supervision
- Coordinating the effective use of volunteers
- Ensuring that volunteers remain motivated, happy, and productive
- Ensuring that volunteers reflect the diversity of young gay/bisexual men in the community

This section provides some suggestions and insights on ways to facilitate volunteers’ contributions to the Project, but we also suggest that Coordinators take full advantage of other resources within their agency or community of information about successfully working with volunteers. Staff from elsewhere in the implementing organization or other organizations may have helpful tips on how to motivate and retain volunteers.
Opportunities for volunteers

There are many opportunities for volunteers in the Mpowerment Project. Not every participant needs to join the Core Group in order to make a valuable contribution to the Project. One of the strengths of the Mpowerment Project is that it offers many ways for young gay/bisexual men to become involved, depending on their interests, talents, and time. Below are numerous examples of volunteer opportunities, grouped by activity areas.

**Volunteer opportunities with the Mpowerment Project**

**Clerical/Administrative**
- answering the telephone
- assisting with mailings/e-mail distributions
- making calls (or sending text messages) to schedule and remind M-group participants
- maintaining mailing/e-mail list of participants
- developing a Project calendar/newsletter/MySpace/Facebook page
- assisting with computer issues
- developing and maintaining the Project website
- developing and maintaining the Project library
- decorating/maintaining Project space
- fundraising/obtaining in-kind donations
- grant writing

**Planning/Design**
- being a member of the Core Group
- helping to plan outreach events
- designing fliers and publicity materials
- designing outreach materials
- assembling outreach materials
- designing and making costumes for the Outreach Team

**Outreach/Contact with Public**
- participating on the Outreach Team
- posting and distributing publicity materials at physical locations as well as online (to physical locations and online social networking sites)
- hosting Social Outreach Events
- recruiting and scheduling M-group participants
- co-facilitating M-groups
- hosting drop-in hours at the Project space

It is vital to express appreciation for Project volunteers and to recognize their contributions.
Involving volunteers in the project and empowering them

The Mpowerment Project has a unique philosophy about working with volunteers. Instead of using volunteers to simply get tasks done, it facilitates a process for participants to take on roles of authority, leadership, and responsibility that fosters a sense of ownership of the Project. It is important that the Coordinators do not convey the idea that the staff is “on top” and that the volunteers work for the staff. Coordinators should be able and willing to participate in all of the tasks volunteers are asked to carry out, acting as mentors to volunteers along the way. It is not appropriate for Coordinators to delegate the most boring and dull tasks to volunteers. For the Project to succeed, the young men who participate in it must develop a sense of ownership of the Project and the Project’s goals.

Every task in the Mpowerment Project can become an opportunity to build community among volunteers (one of its Guiding Principles). For example, envelope stuffing and making safer-sex kits are essential tasks that can readily be performed in a social atmosphere. Likewise, the Outreach Team activities can be fun social opportunities as men get together to make costumes, plan their outreach performances, or gather before an outreach activity at a bar or community event. These activities give participants a chance to spend time together, talk, listen, and get to know and appreciate one other. They are also opportunities to support each other in practicing safer sex, and remind each other to provide the same support to friends.
Recruiting volunteers

Every young man who comes to an Mpowerment Project activity should be personally welcomed by a Project member and given an interest sheet to fill out. (See Figure 5.2. in the Appendix to this module for sample volunteer interest sheets.) The interest sheet contains a question on whether the respondent would like to find out more about Mpowerment Project activities, and also whether he would like to volunteer for the Project. Most importantly, the interest sheets are a way to gather the name and contact information (address, phone, e-mail) of every person who attends a Project activity. Some Projects have found that asking for too much information on the interest sheet deters some men from filling it out, so it’s probably best to keep it simple. The sheet also contains a list of volunteer opportunities so the respondent can check those that interest him.

From the interest sheets it is then possible to compile a Project mailing list, e-mail distribution list, and volunteer database. The Coordinators should review the volunteer list regularly, call men who have indicated an interest in volunteering, and match them with an initial task. Never forget to contact every single person who completes an interest sheet—and as soon as possible after they sign up, since that is when they have expressed interest (as opposed to waiting a while, when they may no longer be interested or available). Not following up on interest sheets has the same effect as telling someone that you don’t really want him involved in the Project. Interest sheets are an invaluable resource for the Project. Treat them like gold!

Since the Project center serves as a drop-in space for many young gay/bisexual men, there are usually a number of men just hanging out at the center. These men can be invited to help with whatever tasks are needed at the time, such as stuffing envelopes, putting together outreach packets, tidying up the center, and so forth. Working on simple tasks together is often an easy way for the participants to get to know each other and the Coordinators. Usually men appreciate being asked to help, and the experience of working on a small task can inspire them to volunteer for future, larger tasks.

Tips for involving volunteers

Start small

Match volunteers with a small task for their first project. If participants begin with an overly ambitious project and fail at it, they will feel less empowered than if they start with a smaller endeavor and succeed. For instance, ask a new volunteer to design an event invitation instead of coordinating the entire event. Then for their next project, give them something a bit more challenging. Start small, but don’t underestimate what volunteers are willing or capable of contributing. At the same time, it is also important to ask for what you need, especially from volunteers who have already demonstrated their capabilities.
Respect their time

Many volunteers have busy social, school, or professional lives. Although some may not be able to volunteer much time to the Project, their contributions—however limited—can prove extremely valuable. It is important to avoid making too many demands on volunteers that may unintentionally create barriers to attracting the most gregarious, socially active men into the Project.

Stress the benefits

There are many benefits to volunteering for the Mpowerment Project. Through volunteering, young men can make new friends, meet potential partners, learn more about HIV issues, participate in outreach events, learn new skills, and feel good about themselves by knowing they are making a contribution to their community. Always point out these benefits when talking to potential volunteers.

Extend a personal invitation

Most young gay/bisexual men decide to volunteer when someone from the Project personally invites them to help out with a task. Try to identify what the potential volunteer might be good at when matching him to a task. Ask him what his talents are. Look at what volunteer opportunities he checked on his interest sheet. Then let the volunteer choose the task that sounds most appealing to him. Remember, volunteers report that they are more willing to participate in areas which seem more relevant to their daily lives and in which they have greater expertise.

Encourage M-group attendance

As discussed previously, encouraging every volunteer to attend an M-group is a very important and useful training and orientation strategy. Through the group, volunteers gain a shared experience of the Project philosophy and activities, and they also learn more about their role to build a supportive, health-promoting community. This will help them to be more effective when they interact with Project participants while performing their volunteer tasks. For example, they will know more about the Project’s approach to safer sex (that it is not only a condom promotion project), which is important if they become involved in developing safer sex materials. The M-groups also teach volunteers how to conduct informal outreach with their friends and with each other.

The Mpowerment Project does not require extensive volunteer training, since doing so might deter many young men from participating and reduce the diversity of volunteers. In fact, this is one way that the Mpowerment Project’s approach to volunteers is quite different from that of many other HIV prevention programs. Many require that potential volunteers attend a long and involved training (sometimes spread over several weekends). In contrast, the Mpowerment Project emphasizes the importance of making it easy for young men to volunteer their time and effort, since it recognizes the many benefits that occur from volunteering.
However, specific on-the-job training is essential, as is more intensive training for certain roles, such as facilitating M-groups. For example, volunteers who help design outreach materials will need on-the-job training in using certain software packages and in avoiding the use of “fear approaches” in materials. An additional benefit in becoming a volunteer may be the acquisition of new skills and experiences. For some young men, this may be an added incentive to becoming involved in the Project.

The Mpowerment Project’s approach to volunteers does not require them to undergo extensive training, but they should be strongly encouraged to participate in an M-group.

**Supervising volunteers**

All staff members should understand that empowering volunteers and maintaining the volunteers’ morale is a critical part of their job. It is important to check in frequently with volunteers to make certain they don’t feel overwhelmed with whatever they are doing. During the day-to-day operation of the Project center, outreach events, and M-groups, it is a good idea to communicate with participants to make sure they are having a positive experience and that they feel their input is heard and appreciated. It is also important that volunteers are assisted to critically analyze and reflect upon their work and upon the role the Project has in the young gay/bisexual men’s community. This kind of reflection and analysis is important in all parts of the Project. We recommend that Coordinators meet periodically with individual volunteers to discuss how their experience is going and whether they would like to continue or change their current activities.

**Support for safer sex**

There is a common misconception that people who volunteer with HIV-prevention programs do not need additional information or support to continue practicing safer sex. Frequently they need just as much support as anyone else. The Project encourages using interactions with volunteers as opportunities to share feelings about safer sex. Activities that involve repetitive tasks like envelope stuffing, collaborative design such as producing a publicity flier, or physical work like cleaning the Project space, often allow volunteers to hold conversations with one another while working. These are appropriate times to provide encouragement and support for struggles the volunteers may have maintaining safer sex in their own lives, and in encouraging their friends to have safer sex. A part of the experience volunteering with the Mpowerment Project includes supporting each other as young gay/bisexual men who are part of a community where safer sex is the norm.

**Support to avoid burnout**

Burnout occurs when volunteers feel overwhelmed, stressed, bored, or frustrated over a period of time and see no reason to believe their situation will change in the foreseeable future. Often burnout among volunteers is a sign of poor management, including lack of support, neglect, or overwork. Within the Mpowerment Project, two areas that volunteers often find demanding and stressful are outreach and group facilitation. All organizations that use volunteers have to deal with
the problem of burnout. The solution is to prevent it by putting into place measures that address volunteer needs. Below are strategies that Project sites have found most successful in preventing volunteer burnout.

- Whenever possible, structure the volunteer work so it can be done in a social and fun way. Outreach activities are what draw many young men to the Project, and meeting social needs is one of the Project's Guiding Principles. Furthermore, when the work environment is enjoyable and involves multiple volunteers, this makes it easier for the volunteers to make new friends, which in turn helps to create community.

- Solicit ideas from volunteers on ways to support their participation, and implement those that can easily be put into place. You could do this by asking, “What would make you feel appreciated for your efforts?”

- Provide debriefing time after outreach events.

- Use pairs or teams of outreach volunteers, rather than having volunteers work alone.

- Hold monthly support meetings for volunteers, and create a relaxing and fun social environment for them.

- Offer volunteers a variety of tasks so they don’t feel that they have to do the same activities all the time.

- Remember that it is preferable for paid staff to do the “grunt work” rather than having volunteers always doing the boring work and paid staff doing the most creative and fun tasks.

- Give away movie passes and/or gift certificates. These can sometimes be obtained at a reduced cost or free-of-charge from local businesses.

- Share whatever positive feedback you receive about the Project with the volunteers.
**Sample 1**  
**First Core Group Agenda**

**Welcome and Introductions**  
*(Can use an “Icebreaker” exercise)*

**Local Issues and Needs**  
*(Brainstorming and discussion by group, write up topics on flip chart.)*

**Vision of Young Gay/Bisexual Men’s Community and How to Meet Needs**  
*(Brainstorming and discussion by group, write up responses on flip chart.)*

**Brief Presentation on New Project**  
*(Be careful to describe it as a community-building Project, within which HIV prevention is addressed—building a supportive community that survives the AIDS epidemic.)*

**Ideal Image of Project**  
*(Discussion by group, write up responses on flip chart.)*

**Do Men want to Join Core Group?**

**Announcements and Next Meeting**

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**Sample 2**  
**Core Group Agenda**

**Welcome, Introductions, and Overview of Project**  
*(Can use “ice-breaker” exercises.)*

**Tour of Space and Discussion of Furniture Needs**

**Name of the Project**  
*(Begin thinking about what to name the Project that will help to convey desired image, remembering guidelines: no AIDS/HIV, education, workshop in name, etc.; write up ideas on flipchart; begin market testing names with friends.)*

**First Events**  
*(Brainstorm and discussion about what events to hold)*

**Community Advisory Board**  
*(Description of its function, purpose, ideas of who to have on it)*

**Next Meetings, Events**

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Download this form as a Word document at [www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure5-1.doc](http://www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure5-1.doc)
Sample 3  
Core Group Agenda

Welcome, Introductions, and Overview of Project  
(Can use “ice-breaker” exercises.)

Present Agenda for Approval  
(Hereafter, always present agenda for approval.)

Ground Rules  
(Discussion of group rules; hereafter, they are mentioned at each meeting, although Core Group members should feel free to paraphrase them in their own jargon, to make them culturally relevant.)

Events Discussion  
(Continue discussion about what events to hold, new ideas, market testing results.)

Discussion of Name for Project  
(Discuss outcome of market testing potential names with friends.)

Core Group Activities  
(Begin to make decisions about first events including large outreach event as well as smaller, recurring events.)

Next Meetings

Sample 4  
Core Group Agenda

Welcome, Introductions, and Overview of Project  
(Can use “ice-breaker” exercises; after the membership of the Core Group stabilizes, you can dispense with overview of Project each time; instead, discuss Project with new Core Group members as they show up for the meeting.)

Present Agenda for Approval

Review Ground rules

Final Selection of the Name of the Project  
(Often this takes more than 3 meetings to arrive at good decision.)

Logo Design Contest  
(Make an announcement about it, when decisions will be made, who to tell about it.)

Decide First Large Event  
(Begin discussing steps that need to be taken, including theme of event, possible dates to do it, ways to build in HIV prevention, when/where/how to do publicity locations, etc.)

Smaller Events/Ongoing Events
Sample Volunteer Interest Sheets

**Figure 5.2**

**AMP Interest Sheet**

Please check those areas of AMP that interest you:

- Outreach/ Safer Sex Promotion
- Marketing/Public Relations
- Designing materials and web
- Small Event Planning
- Large Event Planning
- Public Forum Planning
- Administrative
- AMP House Maintenance
- Sign up for UnPlugged Session

Other ideas for involvement, talents you'd like to share or ideas for new projects you'd like to suggest? Please use the back to explain...

**AMP Interest Form**

Name: ____________________________ Date of Birth: ___________ Age: ___________

Address: __________________________

City: __________________ Zip: ______

Phone: __________________ Email: ______

Do we need to be discreet? Yes / No

How did you hear about AMP?

Please check those areas of AMP that interest you:

- Outreach/ Safer Sex Promotion
- Marketing/Public Relations
- Designing materials and web
- Small Event Planning
- Large Event Planning
- Public Forum Planning
- Administrative
- AMP House Maintenance
- Sign up for UnPlugged Session

Other ideas for involvement, talents you'd like to share or ideas for new projects you'd like to suggest? Please use the back to explain...
Many Mpowerment Projects find it fun and useful to start off their Core Group meeting with an introduction of each participant and a short, engaging icebreaker game. This helps men, especially new men, feel more comfortable talking during the group and also gets the creative juices flowing for the discussions to follow. Here are a few icebreakers that have been used in previous Core Group meetings.

Please feel free to contact us with additional suggestions, and we will add them to the website.

**Penny for your thoughts?**
- **NEEDED:** one penny for each participant
- **DIRECTIONS:** Have each participant take one penny. Have each participant tell a story about something significant about the year on his penny. It is helpful to have pennies minted after most participants were born!

**Take and talk!**
- **NEEDED:** A roll of toilet paper, or enough small objects in a bowl for each participant to take several of, such as straws, pennies, small rocks, wrapped candies, condoms, etc.
- **DIRECTIONS:** Have each participant take from one to ten sheets of toilet paper off the roll, or one to ten objects out of the bowl. When all of the participants have taken at least one piece of toilet paper or one object, tell them that they now get to tell the group as many things about themselves as pieces of toilet paper or objects they took.

**“Question of the week”**
Brainstorm a list of questions. Ask a new question each week. One good resource is The Book of Questions (by Gregory Stock), but it is also fine to make up new questions.

**Examples of questions:**
- Who is your childhood hero and why?
- What book (or person, event, etc.) influenced you the most and how?
- What do you do to get ready every day and why?
- What annoys you the most and how do you deal with it?
- What is your fantasy vacation?
- What is the best meal you cook for yourself?
- What is your family heritage or ethnicity?
- What was the first time you felt different?
- What is your coming out story?
- Etc. etc., … the possibilities are endless!

Note that the questions aren’t answerable with one-word responses. Use them to generate discussion in the group!

**Crossing the stream**
- **NEEDED:** 4-5 “islands”—that is, irregularly cut out pieces of paper, masking tape, and 2 handkerchiefs (one for a blindfold, one to tie someone’s hands together)
- **DIRECTIONS:** Everyone is on the same team. The group has to get from one side of the room to the other “across the stream.” They have to cross by walking together across the “islands.” Once the first participant starts walking across, the person behind him has to follow and keep their foot on the island the first person has his foot on at the same time. So if the first
participant starts with, for example, his left foot on the first island, and then takes a step and puts his right foot on the second island, then the second participant has to put their foot on the first island before the first participant steps with that foot to the third island, and so on.

■ If anyone takes a step without having two feet on the island, then that island gets taken away!

■ To make it more difficult, one person can be blindfolded, one person can have his hands tied together, one person cannot be spoken to, and one person cannot speak! Participants have to communicate with them in a different way.

Show and Tell

■ DIRECTIONS: Ask participants to tell a story about something they have on them...an object from their pocket like a keychain, or lucky charm, their watch or jewelry, even their clothes.

Odds and Ends

■ NEEDED: A bowl or box with enough objects in it for each participant to take one. The assortment of objects should be varied and random: a slinky, a condom, small toys (like cars, action figures, dolls), a dildo, an old cellphone, wristwatch, a rock, a wooden block, a picture frame, a lollipop, koosh ball, odd pen, etc. Just lots of small, odd things with no real connection to each other are good to use.

■ DIRECTIONS: Have the participants blindly select an object. After everyone has their object, have them make up and tell a short story about it.

■ As a variation, the story can go around the room...the first person starts the story about the slinky, and then the next person works the condom into the story, and then the next person works the toy into the story, etc.

■ If you have a lot of participants, make sure the story flows briskly. You don’t want this to get out of hand and turn into an epic!

Tell us a secret!

■ DIRECTIONS: Have each participant tell the group something about themselves that no one in the group knows.

Play favorites

■ Ask participants to answer the question: "Who (or what) is your favorite ________________________, and why?"

■ SUGGESTIONS COULD BE THEIR FAVORITE: Childhood food, music star, movie, book, play, poem, cartoon, comic book hero, gay icon, city, place, person, politician, sports star, magazine, piece of clothing, season, possession, memory, etc. The possibilities are endless here!

Personality tests

■ NEEDED: Get a copy of the personality test from a magazine like Vogue, Cosmo, Teen People, Miss, or something similar. Photocopy enough for each participant to have their own copy.

■ DIRECTIONS: Fill out the personality test as per the magazine instructions. Have each participant read his results. As a variation, they can exchange them with someone else to read, or put them in a pile and randomly draw them and read them for each other.
Two-pair share

**DIRECTIONS:** Split the participants into pairs. The Coordinator should join a pair. If there is an uneven number, the Coordinator can make up part of the pair. Have each person talk about himself to the other participant. Guide the nature of the conversation...invite the participants to ask each other “get to know you” type questions. After 2-3 minutes, switch, so the other person now talks about himself. After 2-3 minutes more, invite the participants back into the group. Have the partners introduce each other to the group and tell about the most interesting things they learned about the other person.

Animal sounds

**NEEDED:** Slips of paper with the names of a variety of animals with distinctive sounds. The number of animals you use will depend on the number of participants you have. Animals can include ducks, dogs, cats, frogs, horses, sheep, or snakes.

**DIRECTIONS:** Have the participants take a slip of paper randomly. After everyone has an animal, tell them to make that animal sound. Then tell all the animals to group together in separate parts of the room. One variation could be that one animal can’t make noise and so has to find his group by just listening to the others.

Birthday game

**NEEDED:** Enough space and chairs for everyone to be in a big circle facing out (X’s can be taped on the floor, or bits of paper...enough for everyone to stand on – facing out – minus one).

Everyone sits down in a chair (or takes a space) except one person who volunteers to start the icebreaker...perhaps the Coordinator?

The first person makes a statement that starts with “A warm wind blows for everyone...” and then makes a statement that might apply to all, several, or even just a few people in the room.

- “A warm wind blows for everyone...who is wearing jeans!”
- “A warm wind blows for everyone...who has blue eyes!”
- “A warm wind blows for everyone...who loves Beyonce!”
- Etc.

Everyone who fits that description has to get up and run around and find a different seat, or space – but not the one next to the spot they are currently in!

The exercise continues for a set amount of time...10-15 minutes is usually sufficient to get peoples’ blood pumping!
This section contains some helpful tips about facilitating Core Group meetings, although it is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to facilitation skills. We strongly recommend that you seek out facilitation skills trainings in your area or look up some of the many good resources out there in your library, bookstore, or online.

The facilitator for Core Group meetings is not expected to be “the expert,” nor “the lecturer.” Instead, a facilitator helps participants to interact with each other, gain new information, think more deeply about issues, and build upon their experiences. The facilitator guides a process that will help participants to reach their stated goals and objectives within the time allotted. The facilitator’s key role is to help the group experience, learn, and analyze issues together. The facilitator is also a member of the Core Group as well as a Coordinator, and it is tricky to keep these roles clear. The Coordinators are encouraged to provide input as Core Group members—but one of them also facilitate the process that occurs during the Core Group meeting. Sometimes a facilitator could be a Core Group member who is not one of the Coordinators. When that occurs, it should be a person who has attended many Core Group meetings and is adept at facilitation skills (as shown in his co-leading some team meetings, such as the Outreach Team).

An effective Core Group facilitator:

- Keeps the Core Group focused on task and process
- Remains as neutral as possible
- Is a guide that helps the group to plan and accomplish its goals
- Listens more than talks
- Encourages everyone to participate, while remembering that individuals participate in different ways.
- Protects members of the group from attack by others
- Is gender and culturally sensitive
- Energizes a group when it seems to be lagging or group members are indicating boredom, or slows it down when it seems that hasty decisions are being made
- Occasionally recaps what has happened in the meeting, and when needed, reminds the group of pertinent discussions or actions from previous meetings.
- Is alert to signs of confusion (puzzled or frustrated looks, people asking neighbors questions, resistance, etc.).
- Doesn’t do the group’s work. Learning is more effective and lasting if the individuals and small groups discover solutions on their own (learning by doing). Frequently ask members if they have questions or wish to offer additional input.

- When asking a question of the group, allow group members time to think before answering. Slowly count to 10. This may seem like a long time and silence may feel uncomfortable, but allowing participants time to think is essential for producing thoughtful answers.

- The facilitator should not feel that he must be an expert. He may need to remind the group (and himself) that he is a facilitator, not a person who knows everything about any topic that comes up. Ask other participants for their ideas on a question. The facilitator doesn’t need to answer everything.

- Is flexible. Changing something midstream doesn’t necessarily mean that planning was done poorly, but rather that the Coordinators are listening, watching, and adjusting the agenda to fit the situation.

A few other general facilitation skills are also important to follow. First, make sure that one person or a few people are not dominating the discussions. One way to handle this is to elicit responses from quieter group members by asking, “Are there any comments from people who haven’t yet said anything on this topic?” Second, ask people to raise their hands if they want to say something. If there are many people wanting to speak, the facilitator should identify who will speak first, second, and third. Often this calms people down as they realize that they will get a turn to talk. Third, remind men not to speak when someone else is speaking so that everyone’s ideas can be heard. And fourth, remind people to limit their side conversations since these are distracting and disrespectful of whoever is speaking.
Brainstorming

The Brainstorming process helps a group generate many ideas in a short period of time. It is an excellent way to come up with many creative solutions to a problem, and to come up with new ideas for events, activities, and/or outreach themes. Some ideas may be radical, others more conservative, others seemingly impossible to implement at first glance. The ideas can be as broad and odd as you like. Brainstorming can be done at any point along the planning process. You can brainstorm all parts of an event or just an activity at an event.

Brainstorming instructions can be as simple as asking the group, "What are your ideas for our next event?" and then writing down every response (no matter how silly an idea seems). Brainstorming works best when everyone is free to be as creative as possible. As such, it's best to tell the group not to evaluate, praise, or criticize any idea until the idea-generating phase is over. Ideas can be evaluated once the brainstorming session has ended. This freedom will allow people to be as creative as they can, without worrying what someone else will say about their suggestion.

The important point about brainstorming is that there should be no pressure to be "brilliant." Simply open your mind to whatever pops into it. Think of it as a kind of free association. When I say "event," what pops into your mind? Much of what you will come up with will not appear to be immediately useful, but that's okay. Some offhand suggestions will spark a brilliant thought in someone else. The evaluation and selection process will come later, and even the ideas not selected at this time can be saved for future planning exercises or outreach theme ideas.

During brainstorming sessions don't allow any criticism of ideas. Remind Core Group members that this is the time to explore possibilities and even to push limits. Judgments and analysis at this stage may stunt idea generation.

Here are some tips on how to run a group brainstorming session:

- Define the event or outreach theme you want to plan, and lay out the criteria to be met (e.g., event promotion, M-groups recruitment and safer sex promotion at the event, food, entertainment, etc.).

- Keep the session focused on the event or outreach theme.

- Ensure that no one criticizes or evaluates ideas during the session. Criticism introduces an element of risk for group members when putting forward an idea. This may stifle creativity and cripple the free running nature of a good brainstorming session.

- Encourage an enthusiastic, uncritical attitude among members of the group. Try to get everyone to contribute and develop ideas, including the quietest members of the group.
Have fun brainstorming! Encourage group members to come up with as many ideas as possible, from solidly practical ones to wildly impractical ones. Welcome creativity.

Encourage people to develop other people’s ideas, or to use other ideas to create new ones.

Appoint one person—usually a Coordinator—to jot down ideas that come out of the session. A good way of doing this is to use a flip chart. This can be studied and evaluated after the session.

**Listing**

This is a brainstorming technique many people find useful. It means doing just what its name suggests—listing possible events, workshops, or outreach themes and then creating sub-lists of other ideas that relate to the original ideas. A list could consist of the main theme of a large event, and then sub-lists would be activities you could conduct at the event that tie in with the theme. Additional sub-lists might be particular phrases or terminology associated with that theme, or aspects of the theme that can be tied into safer sex promotion or community-building.

Remember, hopefully your Core Group members come from diverse segments of the community. They are likely to bring a range of experience to the brainstorming session, which will end up making it more creative. Reminding the group of that, and showing your own enthusiasm and support during the process will build the confidence of participants and increase the success of the session.

Once a list of ideas is developed, you can then begin the selection process. Work with the group to decide what event would be the most appealing, the most interactive, the most fun! Once you have narrowed down the field to 3 or 4 suggestions, you can then decide which one you want to do.

One decision-making process that has met with considerable success and is also fun is to give each Core Group member three votes. You can place little dots or price tag stickers next to the “finalist” ideas, or simply use a show of hands. You can put all three dots next to a single event if you really want that event, or you can split up your votes across two or three event choices. If you have a close tie, then perhaps you can take the two ideas out to the community for additional input. Have the Core Group talk about it with friends to get suggestions of what would be fun and successful. Then together make a final decision at the next Core Group meeting.
Nine Core Group Conflict Management Tips

Conflict among Core Group members is inevitable. In fact, conflict can be helpful when it challenges Core Group to explore new ideas, increases curiosity about differences, and stretches the group’s problem solving and outreach events planning efforts. However, managing conflict within a team made up of different individuals and cultural groups can be challenging due to the differences in values, assumptions, and communication styles. Team building techniques that help members understand the nature of this conflict and constructive methods for resolving it will help them work out disagreements on their own. The following are some guidelines to keep in mind when developing the Core Group and managing conflict. Again, we suggest that you also seek out local courses or seminars on conflict resolution.

1. Create a Core Group environment that encourages members to be open to sharing information about themselves and increases their willingness to hear and accept feedback from others on their ideas and input.

2. Facilitate the Core Group’s understanding that conflict is a result of differences in needs, objectives, and values. Indicate that these differences enhance and enrich the Core Group because despite differences, there can be commonality.

3. Indicate that the group can work to understand differences in a respectful manner while attempting to recognize common ground.

4. Core Group members may differ in how they express disagreement, and those differences may be based on culture or individual experience. These difference can be sources of mutual misunderstanding and can block teamwork. It may be necessary to explore these differences in order to work through issues, collaborate, and compromise.

5. Do not intervene too quickly when conflict occurs between two or more Core Group members. Allow them an opportunity to work it out among themselves first. However, observe how they individually handle the conflict so you can offer constructive feedback so that some resolution is achieved.

6. Intervene to work out the solution if the conflict escalates. Perhaps you can suggest a private conversation to resolve the issue, or an agreement to disagree while the Core Group can work out a new plan.

7. If absolutely necessary, use a third party to mediate. The impartial mediator focuses on helping each Core Group member understand the problem, the different points of view among them, identifies barriers, and then identifies what needs to happen to come to a solution. Make sure at least the Coordinators or two Core Group members have received training to competently mediate disputes.

8. Sometimes individual team members do not have the level of commitment to the team or the level of personal growth needed to work through conflict within a team setting. A Coordinator may need to consider working with individuals separate from the group meetings in order to satisfy their needs and to work on the task at hand. It may also be that the person may work better on a different team, or on individualized tasks.

9. At staff meetings or Project Supervisor meetings, review conflict resolution skills periodically in order to build on the knowledge base.

Here are two websites that offer helpful publications on conflict resolution and management, as well as other team and facilitation materials:

http://www.mediate.org/about-us/resources/books/
http://www.communityatwork.com/
Appendix

Module 5: Core Group

Sample Core Group Agenda for Established Core Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name________________________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CORE GROUP AGENDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date _______________________________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Welcome**

**Ground Rules**

**Introduction / Icebreaker**

1. Last Event or activity: Discuss success or challenges, who was reached, and lessons learned.
2. Next Event: Brainstorm ideas, start planning. Don’t forget about how to incorporate safer sex messages into the event!
3. Outreach: Ideas, suggestions, and status of outreach; safer sex promotion in community venues; promotion of Social Outreach events and safer sex promotion at Social Outreach events (it’s very important to include a safer sex message into the Social Outreach event); outreach themes, costumes and materials.
4. Publicity: What is being done, what works, what could improve?
5. Informal Outreach: Are we talking to our friends about safer sex and building a strong community?
6. M-groups: What is attendance like? Who do we need to recruit? How?
7. Community Issues: What is going on with young gay/bisexual men? Are we addressing their needs? Are we leaving anyone out?
8. Calendar: Upcoming events, ideas, and community information.
9. Parking lot issues
10. Announcements

**Thank you! – And good night!**
You can use this simple checklist to cover all your bases when running Core Group meetings!

### Prepare for Core Group!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agenda set and written out on flip chart paper or whiteboard</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Space clean and ready for Core Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condom bowls filled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snacks out</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome guys to Core Group</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call meeting to order</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductions &amp; icebreaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate the Core Group meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social time after meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze Core Group with fellow Coordinators or Project Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fill out needed record forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss Core Group with Project Supervisor and Coordinators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check in with Core Group volunteers after the meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Download this form as a Word document at [www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure5-8.doc](http://www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure5-8.doc)
Together creating community
for friendship
for health
for life

mpowerment.org
The Center for AIDS Prevention Studies
University of California, San Francisco
50 Beale Street, Suite 1300
San Francisco, CA  94105
415.597.9306

Download a PDF of Module 5, Core Group & Other Volunteers, at
www.mpowerment.org/download/module5.pdf
Objectives

To describe:

1. why it is important for the Mpowerment Project to have a space of its own;
2. what to look for in a space;
3. to offer guidelines about how to select a space; and
4. to suggest how to set up a space to be effective and appealing.
mPowerment

“HOUSE RULES”

1. Confidentiality: Private or sensitive information shared at the 4H-ouse is not repeated outside.
2. Use I statements: You discuss what you feel, rather than speaking in general terms about what most people think.
3. Mutual respect: We listen to others in a respectful manner, whether you agree or not. Diversity in all senses of the word is both accepted and respected.
4. Have fun: Project's activities are for fun and to be enjoyable.
Home, Sweet Home: Not just any space will do

Finding the right space for the Project is one key to its success. If young gay/bisexual men find the space comfortable, desirable, and convenient, they will be more likely to attend Project activities. Ideally, the space will serve as a gathering spot or community center for young gay/bisexual men. Even if you don’t have enough money for a stand-alone Project space, it’s really important to consider alternative spaces where Project participants can meet on a regular basis. Since most activities occur here, the space becomes an important aspect of the Project’s goal to build community. It provides a consistent setting where participants can meet and socialize.

The importance of having a separate space

There are three main reasons for having a separate space for the Mpowerment Project:

1. It is more convenient to have your own location where you can hold most Project activities.

2. A separate space can help in building a strong and healthy young gay/bisexual men’s community, and is often more comfortable for young gay/bisexual men than other arrangements. A separate space helps to give the Project a sense of identity, and can be used to build pride in being gay. Projects specifically for young men of color can use the space to build pride in being of specific ethnic/racial heritage.

3. It makes it easier to display sexually graphic, gay-specific safer sex posters and distribute safer sex promotional materials and condoms. This helps build an environment that supports safer sex and testing.
Each of these points is discussed below in greater detail. But in brief, a Project space offers young men a place where:

- they can find other young gay/bisexual men, to build supportive relationships, make new friends
- they can be comfortable being openly gay/bisexual, and can get support for being proud about their sexual orientation and same sex attraction
- they can meet and talk about anything, without worrying that people uncomfortable with their sexual orientation will be there to hassle them
- they have real time, in-person alternatives to online communities
- they can be in an environment that supports their having safer sex and getting tested
- if they are part of an ethnic or racial minority group, they can feel support and build pride about their racial/ethnic background

Convenience

Simply put, it is more convenient to have a safe space of your own—one that is gay-friendly, private, and discrete. This will eliminate your having to deal with issues that might arise regarding sexuality and being gay or bisexual. Project participants will be able to arrange the space the way they want, and make it attractive to young gay/bisexual men. The space will be available whenever you want it, so you won’t have to find a new location every time you plan a new activity. Given the number of activities that the Project conducts, this will save time and energy. And probably your own space will be more affordable over time than renting outside spaces. Although occasionally you will want to hold activities somewhere else—usually when you need a larger space—most activities can be held at your own space. Having your own space will also save you from having to negotiate with the owners of other spaces.

In many communities where the Mpowerment Project has been implemented, organizations have rented a space that eventually became, in essence, a young men’s community center that also housed the Project. The space has been used in many different ways. Most groups connected to the Project meet in the space. These include staff meetings, some Community Advisory Board meetings, Core Group meetings, volunteer committee meetings, and most M-groups. Most Social Outreach Events have also been held at the space. These include occasional Social Outreach Events such as parties, open houses, and small forums, in addition to weekly events such as video nights and discussion groups.

The MPower House in Albuquerque had an outdoor space that began as a small weed-filled lot adjoining a separate unused side yard. Through the hard work of volunteers, they converted the space into a volleyball court which saw action every Sunday afternoon throughout the spring, summer, and fall. In addition, the space was used for picnics and barbecues. Mpowerment Detroit used a loft space located downtown. The space was large, open, and easily
The Project space is essential to building a supportive community for young men. Adaptable sofas and chairs could be pushed aside for large events. The walls were decorated with photos of core group members and participants, nicely framed and carefully hung. The space felt homey, welcoming, and most of all, safe and accessible.

When Projects have their own space, it is easier to set up specific “drop-in” days and times when young gay/bisexual men can just hang out and socialize. It is also possible to leave out referral information (e.g., where to get tested for HIV and other STDs, places to obtain job training, mental health referrals), as well as a small library of books, magazines, and videos of interest to young gay/bisexual men. We also recommend having a large calendar on display in the Project space that lists all the Project’s upcoming events. Having this visual reminder helps increase attendance and makes scheduling other events easier.

Building community, support and pride

In the last 10-15 years, some things have changed in society. Being out isn’t as controversial as it once was. There are now “out” celebrities hosting daily TV shows, and openly gay sitcom and drama characters are part of the television landscape. Discussion about same sex marriage is commonplace in the news, and national politicians talk about our lives, for better or worse. The Internet continues its explosive growth and hosts tons of websites and social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, where gay/bisexual men can chat with each other, share their stories, support each other, make friends, or find sex partners.

In the face of all this change, some people have questioned whether young gay/bisexual men still have the same need for community as in the past. Our experience working with and watching Mpowerment Projects operate around the country—Projects that reach very diverse populations—tells us the answer is a resounding “Yes!” Young gay/bisexual men still want and need the support, safety, and power that a community-building project like the Mpowerment Project offers. We continue to hear young men tell us about the tremendous impact that the Mpowerment Project has had in their lives, in terms of a host of issues. HIV prevention is prominent among them, but they include other important issues as well, such as coming out, making friends, family pressures, dealing with homophobia, alienation, isolation, and self-esteem.

As previously described, this Project seeks to mobilize young gay/bisexual men to speak with and encourage each other about the need for safer sex and...
getting tested regularly. However, when they have few friends, such efforts are less effective. If a young man is only hearing supportive conversations about safer sex and testing from one or two friends, it is not nearly as effective as when he’s hearing such messages from numerous friends, who are also expressing caring and support to him. Therefore, an important aspect of the Project is to help these men be part of a larger, supportive young gay/bisexual men’s community. This is one of the Project’s Guiding Principles, the importance of building a supportive community for young men. A separate Project space greatly increases the opportunities to build new friendships with other young gay/bisexual men who have also heard the same messages about safer sex and testing. Therefore, the Project space is an important way of supporting this Guiding Principle.

A Project space offers young men the following

In such an environment friendships flourish, and new social networks that support safer sex and testing develop. It encourages community-building. A second Guiding Principle is also enacted at the space: pride in being gay/bisexual and in having same-sex attractions.

By offering a variety of activities in your Project space, it can become the focal point of a health-promoting, supportive, and empowered young gay/bisexual men’s community.

The space can also be used in building pride in being of specific ethnic/racial backgrounds. For example, posters and materials can focus on being African American and can have materials about Black gay/bisexual men who have been leaders in the community, poetry can be posted about the beauty of being of African descent, or materials in the space can feature information on Black inventors, scientists, and political leaders (including pride in having an African American president). Similarly, pride in being of Latin American descent can be displayed in a space, or of other ethnic/racial groups.

Maintaining a supportive, safer sex environment

A separate Project space can also be used to remind everyone about the need for safer sex and to know their current HIV status. Posters about HIV prevention and testing can hang on the walls, and safer sex materials can be placed throughout the space, both in public spaces (e.g., in bowls around the space) as well as in private spaces (e.g., in the bathroom, where someone can take condoms without being seen by others). Therefore, men who are simply hanging out in the Project space are continually reminded of these issues. Without a separate space, maintaining a display of appropriate safer sex materials tailored to your local community of young gay/bisexual men can be much more difficult.
WHAT SOME YOUNG GAY/BISEXUAL MEN HAD TO SAY ABOUT THEIR PROJECT SPACE:

“I like the house, I think it’s a good thing for people to have one place to go instead of meeting at different people’s houses or apartments or whatever... I think it’s good to have a solid base so you can do things here...”

“This is a place where guys can come to hang out together, to meet other guys, to feel good about being gay and to protect and support each other.”

“I love our house, we made it feel like a place that someone actually lives as opposed to some place that’s an extension of the AIDS project.”

“For me the best part of MPower is the feeling that I’m in a safe place... MPower to me is very safe... I allow myself to relax a little bit, I allow myself to have fun... I really don’t hold back on any movements I usually make that might be a little too loud... I’m in a safe place here... I’m among friends.”

“I think it’s great to have a center open for guys to come by and come and go when they want. I think it’s very important to have a central location, a central command.”
Options for creating the Project space

The Project space can be configured in a variety of ways depending on the needs and resources of each community. Below are some alternatives.

**Independent space**

The Project rents independent space that is used solely for Mpowerment Project activities. As discussed above, this option is ideal, because it provides the physical space needed to create a true community center for young gay/bisexual men. Additionally, the content or appearance of safer sex posters or pamphlets geared toward gay/bisexual men may be graphic. With an independent Project space, there are opportunities for displaying materials that might be controversial in mixed-use settings. If it is possible to obtain an independent space for your Project, we strongly recommend you do so. Unfortunately, this is also the most expensive option, and for many communities this may not be possible. However, many organizations have had success in obtaining funding for their Project space from the CDC, foundations, and/or state health departments.

**Shared space**

The Project shares space within an existing organization such as a lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community center, youth center, or other organization. This option has a number of advantages in that it creates an automatic linkage with another community agency. Before choosing it, however, carefully consider the implications of affiliating with particular organizations. An agency’s reputation in the community can either help or damage the impression that young gay/bisexual men will have of your Project when they learn of the affiliation. Whatever organization is chosen should be one that young gay/bisexual men find appealing and comfortable.

**A word of caution**

The Project should avoid being perceived by young gay/bisexual men as an HIV/AIDS organization. Therefore, we strongly recommend against hosting Mpowerment activities at an AIDS Service Organization (ASO), even when an ASO is the sponsoring or implementing agency. In communities where we have helped to set up Mpowerment Projects, we have quickly learned that many young gay/bisexual men were not interested in working or socializing at HIV/AIDS-related organizations, or were even repelled by it. Our research found that HIV/AIDS is not a particularly motivating topic for most young gay/bisexual men. *(See Module 1: Overview for a more full discussion of this topic)*. Therefore, conducting events at an ASO may limit the number and types of young men who attend the activities.

**Multiple spaces**

The Project uses a network of spaces for different Project activities instead of one central location. For example, the administrative functions and staff office may be located at one location, such as at an office within the implementing agency, and each of the various Project activities (M-groups, Core Group meetings, and Social Outreach activities) may take place in different locations. These spaces can be rented or donated for both ongoing and one-time use as needed.
As stated earlier, it is important to choose these locations carefully. There is no reason, for example, why the Project’s administrative work cannot be done in the implementing agency office space or other HIV-related space, since usually only the Project Coordinators are involved in those activities. However, for other Project activities, the location is critical.

While meeting spaces at AIDS Service Organizations, religious institutions, or mental health providers may be readily available in your community, they may not appeal to many young gay/bisexual men. Meeting in people’s homes or in local cafes can be low-cost alternatives. This option offers a number of advantages since each space can be selected based on the nature of the event. For example, a small, homey setting may be appropriate for M-groups, whereas a large warehouse space may be ideal for large social outreach events. It also makes it possible for Project activities to take place in different settings, and participants may like having this variety of meeting places. In addition, it provides an opportunity to reach out to different segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community. For instance, Social Outreach Events might alternate between various neighborhoods within the community, thereby reaching different groups of men. If the Project is trying to reach men across a very large area, then having multiple meeting spaces throughout the area may be the best option.

One way to solve the logistical problem of needing to assemble and haul materials from place to place is to prepare plastic crates full of materials. These can easily be transported to each meeting space. For example, one crate could contain all of the supplies necessary for an M-group (See Module 9: M-groups), and the facilitators could just pick up the crate from the office before each group and take it to the various locations. This option minimizes last-minute scrambling around for the necessary supplies.
Steps in choosing a space

“Location, location, location!” So the cliché goes, and in choosing a space for the Project, it’s advice that’s worth following.

Identify the best areas

The first step in selecting a space is to determine where the best places are to locate the Project in your town or city. For this research you’ll want to use some of the community assessment techniques described in *Module 2: Community Assessment*.

This task can be as simple as talking with a cross-section of young gay/bisexual men in your community. Be sure to include men of different ages, income, education levels, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and neighborhoods. Find out from them what they think the best location(s) would be. Here are some important criteria to consider:

- Which parts of town are most easily accessible for young gay/bisexual men?
- Do you need a car to get there, or is it close to public transportation?
- If young men will be driving to the space, is there adequate parking?
- In general, how appealing are the various areas to young gay/bisexual men?
- How comfortable would men of diverse backgrounds feel in the neighborhood?
- How safe are various areas for young gay/bisexual men?
- How affordable are the rents in particular areas?

We have found that by informally interviewing about 10-15 young gay/bisexual men from different segments of the community, a consensus usually emerges about the most desirable locations for the Project. If the Project is started before space is located, then we strongly encourage Core Group members and Project participants to be actively involved in the decision-making process. In this case, Project staff alone should not make the decision about where to locate the Project.
A consensus usually emerges about the most desirable locations for the Project.

**Work with realtors**

Scour newspaper listings and check with local realtors for leads—especially gay or gay-friendly realtors. We found our spaces in Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, and Albuquerque with the help of local gay and lesbian realtors who volunteered their time to help us. (The commission on small rental properties is usually very small, which explains, in part, why realtors who are willing to help find suitable sites may also be willing to donate their time.)

**Look and search yourself**

Use whatever avenues are available to you to put the word out that you are looking for a space to rent. Contact people who may know of spaces. Look for “For Rent” signs. In smaller and mid-sized communities, this is likely to be the most effective approach. This is how we found great spaces in Eugene and Albuquerque. However, you sometimes need to work with a realtor even if you identify a location yourself. We would recommend always working with a realtor even if you locate it yourself, since they know many of the issues that come up in renting spaces, unless there is someone at the implementing agency who already knows about such issues.

**Network**

Put the word out that you’re looking for a space to rent, using whatever avenues are available to you. Write letters or phone people who may know of spaces. Place announcements in newsletters, post flyers, and use sites on the Internet such as craigslist. Let as many people as you can think of know that you are looking for a space and tell them what your specifications are (size, rent, location, etc.). Local churches often own property— including houses, apartment buildings, and office spaces—which they are willing to rent to non-profit organizations for well below the market value. Sometimes other property owners will provide space cheaply or at no-cost for tax write-off purposes. It can’t hurt to ask as many people as you can for a good deal; the worst that can happen is that someone will say no.

**Check out each potential space in person**

First, identify all the criteria that are important for your space, such as price, size, location, condition, versatility, functionality, neighbors and the landlord. For example, if the neighborhood is totally quiet and residential, having large Social Outreach Events on Friday nights that attract 75 young, loud, and proud gay/bisexual men could be problematic and generate complaints from the neighbors. Also, if the landlord seems homophobic and unsupportive of the Project, you may be in for up-coming battles. We have found that many landlord’s concerns can be taken care of by reassuring them that Project participants will not be sleeping in the space and that the Project will not be offering clinical services. Of course, these concerns vary from landlord to landlord. You can use the following checklist to help in your decision-making process.
### Potential Project Space Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which property</th>
<th>Rate each of the following on a 1-5 scale (1=poor, 5=excellent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square footage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location in community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Versatility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Transportation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of room for small group meeting (M-group, Outreach Teams)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of room for larger meetings (Core Group)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, we recommend that the Project Coordinators along with one or two volunteers visit each potential space and discuss its pros and cons. The Coordinators and volunteers should ask themselves if the space meets their minimum qualifications, and decide together how successful it will be to mold the space into a warm and welcoming center for young gay/bisexual men. The final decision should be based on the information that has been compiled about the various spaces. Negotiations might be necessary with the landlord for such things as repairs, safety bars on windows, smoke/burglar alarms, and wheelchair accessibility.

**Furnishing the space**

The process of furnishing the space is an important team-building exercise for the Core Group, and it’s fun for everyone. It helps volunteers get to know each other. It allows them to feel that the space is really theirs. It also provides them with a sense of accomplishment and empowerment as they watch the space become their “home.” And who knows better than young gay/bisexual men what type of décor will be most appealing and comfortable for themselves and their peers? (See table below for suggested furnishings. These are discussed more later in this module.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Furniture</th>
<th>Office Equipment</th>
<th>Homey Touches</th>
<th>Outdoor Supplies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desks</td>
<td>Telephone (with 2 separate lines)</td>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>Potted Plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Bulletin Board</td>
<td>Posters/artwork (especially gay-positive themes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couches</td>
<td>Answering Machine</td>
<td>Knick-knacks</td>
<td>Barbecue Grill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairs</td>
<td>Flip charts/Marker pens</td>
<td>Coffee/tea-maker</td>
<td>Volleyball net + ball Basketball net + ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee table</td>
<td>Office supplies</td>
<td>Popcorn maker</td>
<td>Picnic or patio table + chairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side tables</td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Pots/pans</td>
<td>Lawnmower/weed eater/leaf blower/rake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillows for sitting on</td>
<td>Fax machine</td>
<td>Microwave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookshelves</td>
<td>Large Calendar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV/DVD player</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereo or boom box</td>
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</table>
In our sample budget, we allocate $4,000 to furnish the space, and we included such items as lawn mowers, plants, and computers. What you spend to furnish the space is completely adjustable and up to you. Craigslist has a “free” section where a simple word search for “sofa” can generate many options if you’re willing to pick up the items. Beyond the Internet, there are still the options of yard sales, thrift shops, and other used furniture stores.

Many businesses and hospitals donate old furniture to nonprofit organizations after remodeling or redecorating. Additionally, donations of furniture and household items may come from young men involved in the Project and Community Advisory Board members. Not only can excellent bargains be found through donated goods, but used furniture has a nicely worn quality that helps make the space feel instantly “lived in.”

**Characteristics of a good Project space**

*The following are characteristics of a good Project space.*

**Welcoming and homey** Whatever option your organization chooses for its space, we cannot stress enough that from the start the space should be welcoming to all newcomers who walk through the door. While the physical space does not dictate the atmosphere of a Project’s space, this remains an important point to remember when creating space for your Project.

An ideal Project space should feel like a home—cozy, warm, easy to relax in, and a place where guys will want to hang out to socialize. Having music playing in the background helps create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. The furnishings are another key to creating this atmosphere. Funky, used furniture from yard sales is more likely to create a comfortable feeling than new, perfectly coordinated office furniture.

Homey touches, including framed pictures of core group members or participants, plants, and artwork can really help create a comfortable feel for the space.

Remember that the images and furnishings in your space should reflect the diversity of the young gay/bisexual men in your community. Bright colorful paints can add warmth to a dark room, and inexpensive mirrors can be hung to give the appearance of windows in enclosed spaces.

**Supporting pride** It is also important to use the space thoughtfully in order to support pride in the young men. The space can have pictures of young gay/bisexual men being proud of who they are. As mentioned earlier, if the Project is ethnic-specific (for example, for young Black gay/bisexual men), then having photos of men of that ethnic/racial group can be used to promote pride. For example, the space can show Black gay leaders, or positive images of Black gay men.
If a single space is used for all Project activities, then it must be highly versatile. Since the space must be appropriate for M-groups and other meetings, office work, and Social Outreach Events, we have found that what works best is to have several rooms within the space that can be used for particular functions. At the minimum, the space should have a work area for the staff that includes a place to store Project materials, and a larger, more informal space for meetings and socializing. The more versatile the space is, the easier it is for the Project to offer a variety of Social Outreach Events on site. For example, we have transformed the same Project space into an art gallery, party room, discussion group setting, video party space, and even a haunted house for Halloween.

Since there will be a considerable amount of foot traffic in the Project space, with participants coming and going and different activities occurring back-to-back, the space must be relatively easy to keep clean and presentable. Hardy plants and sturdy furnishings that require minimal upkeep are ideal. Several Projects have had success asking a volunteer or a team of volunteers to help out with cleaning or maintenance on a regular basis, but other Projects found it works better to schedule certain days for housekeeping or yard clean-up. In addition to getting lots of work done, these events also served a social and community-building purpose.

The Project space must serve a variety of functions, so it should be set up in such a way that it allows different activities to occur at the same time. The Project staff will need a relatively quiet space where they can work on individual tasks such as keeping records, preparing reports, and planning agendas. One room is needed that is large enough to accommodate up to 15-20 people for Core Group meetings. This room could also double as the space for Social Outreach Events and drop-in periods. Although it is not always possible, there is a real advantage to finding a space with a kitchen.
This simplifies the job of preparing and storing refreshments for Project participants and can be used for Social Outreach Events. For example, some of the Mpowerment Projects have regular Sunday dinners for participants. Food is always a big draw, so the meal itself is a social event and an opportunity for community-building. Following the meal, the men then take part in a community forum on a given topic. At our Project sites, we have usually rented spaces that were between 1,500 to 2,000 square feet.

**Promotes safer sex**

The Mpowerment Project helps young gay/bisexual men expand their social networks. Yet this increased social contact does not guarantee that young gay/bisexual men will feel more supported or that group norms will now favor safer sex. In fact, the norms in the larger young men’s community tend to favor risk-taking with sex and drugs. It is critical, therefore, that as young gay/bisexual men develop closer social ties through Project activities, the Project influences them to support one another in practicing safer sex.

Since so many young gay/bisexual men will enter the space, the space itself becomes an excellent opportunity for promoting safer sex. By having some safer sex posters on the walls, bowls of condoms and lubricants on the tables and in the bathroom (where young men can take them privately), and pamphlets, magazines, books, and videos available that feature safer sex, the Project environment contributes to supporting a norm that encourages safer sex among those who pass through the space.

At the same time, however, too many safer sex posters can be overwhelming and may result in guys believing that AIDS prevention is the sole purpose of the organization. Some men may be turned off by posters that are too sexually explicit, especially if many of them are on display. Therefore, you may want to balance safer sex posters with more “generic” posters. Gay positive images of pride parades, marches, and so forth may create pride among Project participants and help some men feel more comfortable about their sexuality. Of course not all posters or artwork have to have a deeper meaning. Art for its own sake is also a good thing in any Project space.
It is important to use a variety of materials and images so you will reach different segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community in your area. It is extremely important to have posters depicting men of color rather than just white men in order to make men of color feel comfortable at the space. If you are trying to reach young gay men of color, it is important to avoid showing groups of men in which you have only one man of each ethnic group mixed in. This is often not seen as very authentic to men of color. Instead, show men of color with each other, or photos with several men from each ethnic group represented. If the Project is specifically focused on one ethnic/racial group, then show men of that group in the photos, but also always considering diversity within that group.
The table below contains a list of catalogs that offer safer sex posters, videos, and other materials. Project volunteers can also develop high-quality, customized safer sex promotional materials that can be displayed in the Project space. These can be cute “cut and paste” collage style posters or more sophisticated materials developed with a computer software package (e.g., Photoshop, InDesign) and a scanner. Materials can also be found on the Web by conducting a Google image search for “safe sex poster” or “safer sex poster.” Having Project participants create their own sex-positive, gay-positive, and ethnic/racial group-positive materials can be an extremely empowering process for the volunteers, and this process helps the volunteers internalize the HIV prevention messages. Additionally, displaying the materials in the Project space helps give them a sense of pride and accomplishment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safe-sex/HIV prevention poster resources: Where good posters can be found</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GMHC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIDS Committee of Toronto</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>California AIDS Clearinghouse</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Prevention Information Network</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Providing resources

The Project space can also serve an important function as an informational resource, linking young men who come to the center with available services within the community. It is useful for the center to maintain a current directory of referral agencies and services on such topics as medical care, HIV and STD-testing sites, gay-friendly counseling services, substance abuse treatment facilities, and suicide hotlines. If the population that your Project is trying to reach is from a lower socioeconomic background and needs life skills training, then providing referrals to places for emergency housing, obtaining GEDs, and job training may be very important. It may also be helpful to have such organizations come to the space and make presentations about the services they provide. Bulletin boards can display information on housing, jobs, and entertainment, including flyers that advertise relevant local organizations and upcoming events. In addition, it is helpful to have a browsing library of books, magazines, and DVDs of interest to young gay/bisexual men, since this will motivate them to hang out in the Project space.

A discrete exterior

We recommend that the outside of the space have nothing which identifies it as a gay or HIV-related organization. This is important for two reasons. First, not all of the men the Project aims to reach would feel comfortable entering—or being seen entering—a building that is visibly identifiable as gay or HIV-related. Many of the young men who are most in need of the Project’s services may not fully identify as gay or bisexual or be “out” within their community. These men are highly unlikely to walk into a building draped with rainbow flags and pink triangles. Furthermore, not all young men of color identify with such images, since these images are often used in the “mainstream” gay community that sometimes excludes men of color. Likewise, due to the stigma surrounding AIDS and its association with homosexuality, HIV-related signs and symbols should be avoided. This also fits with the Guiding Principles, which caution that many young men do not want to go to AIDS prevention activities.

A second important reason for maintaining a discreet exterior is for safety. Unfortunately, in many communities there are homophobic individuals who are prone to attack and destroy anything they perceive as representing or promoting homosexuality. A building that is clearly identified as a young gay/bisexual men’s center may become a target for vandalism and homophobic attacks, and may threaten the safety of Project participants inside the space or walking to and from it. For this reason, it is important that the outside be safely lit. It should also be free of potentially dangerous elements such as dark passageways, or vegetation and corners that obstruct pedestrians’ views as they enter or leave.
House rules

**Feel warm and supportive**

The first time that men come to the Project space, we have found that it is helpful to greet them with a smile and a friendly introduction. Then show them around the space, introducing them to whomever is there at the time. Give them a calendar of upcoming events so they can learn what’s happening at the Project, sign them up for an M-group, and/or ask them if they would like to volunteer on a project that matches their interests.

These first impressions are a critical time for newcomers. Their first impression is likely to be a lasting one, and they will probably share this impression with their friends. Unfortunately, sometimes a Project can make a bad first impression on a newcomer. Nothing can turn a person off as quickly as feeling ignored, excluded from the “in group,” or overhearing gossipy or catty comments. No Project wants these kinds of impressions shared throughout the community.

Therefore, we suggest you make sure that community-building is always seen as the Project space’s first and most important priority. In order to maintain this positive atmosphere, the Coordinators and Core Group members need to vigilantly watch their own and others’ attitudes. M-Project in Wilton Manors, Florida created a set of house rules, adapted from the M-group, which they displayed prominently in the house.

- **Confidentiality** means that private or sensitive information shared at the Project space is not repeated outside of the group without that person’s permission.

- **Use ‘I’ Statements** means that you discuss what you feel on a topic, rather than speaking in general terms about what most people think.

- **Mutual Respect** means that you listen to others in a respectful manner, whether you agree with them or not. It is natural to disagree sometimes. By respecting others, you make it safe for everyone to express differing viewpoints and opinions. This also enables diverse opinions and views to be expressed. It also means that diversity in all senses of the word is both accepted and respected.

- **Have Fun!** means that the Project’s activities should be fun and enjoyable. The work we are doing is important, but be careful not to become overly serious while doing it.

Their intention was that the rules be adhered to in all activities at the space. These guidelines were discussed at Project meetings and raised when conflicts arose. Often Coordinators spoke privately with Project participants when their comments became too negative or when they began to form cliques. When feedback was given in a friendly and supportive manner, the
In many Mpowerment Projects, house rules are often reviewed at the start of Project meetings. Participants usually responded positively to the gentle reminder that the Project space needs to be welcoming, inclusive, and safe for everybody. Such an atmosphere is crucial to the Project’s most important goal of building community. In many Mpowerment Projects, house rules are often reviewed at the start of Project meetings.

It is important for all participants to know and feel confident that private and sensitive information they reveal during activities held at the Project’s space will not be repeated elsewhere in the community. In addition, when conflicting ideas are presented during meetings, it may be important to remind participants about the need for mutual respect. Although ultimately it is always the responsibility of the Project Coordinators to address such concerns, ideally Core Group members and other active volunteers will also share responsibility for reinforcing the house rules. Project staff and volunteers can be effective role models of these rules, but sometimes the issues may need to be aired in direct discussions. From time to time, Coordinators may have to speak with Core Group members or volunteers privately if they are being disruptive or very negative in their interactions with others.

**The rules of the space are clear**

Each Project’s staff and implementing organization must determine the rules of their space and clearly communicate these rules to all of the people who use it. The Coordinators or volunteers in charge of each activity are responsible for enforcing the rules. Be sure to post the hours when the space is open for drop-in or meetings. You will also need to decide whom to entrust with keys to the space. Whomever is selected must be reliable, since they will be expected to open the space during those hours. In addition to the generic house rules (See above), we have found that the following guidelines about the Project space are important in making all participants feel comfortable and safe. Mpowerment Projects have not posted these, but have let them be known through discussions the Coordinators have had with Core Group members and volunteers.
Guidelines for the Project space:

- No alcohol or drugs are allowed in the space.
- Individuals who disrupt meetings or activities may be asked to leave.
- No sexual behavior is permitted at the space.
- No one is allowed to spend the night at the space.
- No firearms, knives, or other dangerous articles are permitted in the space.
Each Project's staff and implementing organization must determine the rules of their space and clearly communicate these rules to all of the people who use it.
Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team

Objectives
To familiarize you with the elements of the Mpowerment Project’s formal outreach, including:

1. Social Outreach Events (ranging from events that attract 10 men to events that attract 200-300 or more men)
2. The Outreach Team, and
3. Outreach materials that promote safer sex and testing.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module:
Figure 7.1 Sample timeline for planning large and medium sized Social Outreach Events
Figure 7.2 Sample monthly events calendars
Figure 7.3 Sample weekly event email reminders, Austin, TX
Figure 7.4 Sample weekly event email reminders, Albuquerque, NM
Figure 7.5 Sample Outreach Team Planning Form
Figure 7.6 Outreach Team Evaluation Form
Formal Outreach is a critically important component of the Mpowerment Project. As most AIDS service organizations can attest, very few young gay/bisexual men will seek out HIV prevention services on their own. Instead, an effective HIV prevention program must reach out to these young men where they are, or attract them to activities that are naturally appealing to them and then, once they are there, promote safer sex and testing within the context of the event. The Mpowerment Project uses a variety of creative and innovative approaches to reach young gay/bisexual men with safer sex and testing messages.

Formal Outreach is different than Informal Outreach (See Module 8: Informal Outreach). Formal Outreach refers to the Social Outreach Events that the Project conducts and to the Outreach Teams who engage the community in fun, interactive HIV prevention activities. Informal Outreach involves young men talking with their friends and acquaintances about the need for HIV testing and safer sex in order to establish safer behaviors as the community norm.
The elements of Formal Outreach

**Social Outreach Events**

The Project attracts young gay/bisexual men to it by sponsoring fun, interesting Social Outreach Events where safer sex and HIV testing is promoted, although HIV testing is not offered during the events themselves. The events provide participants with opportunities to make friends who can support them in HIV prevention and in becoming further involved with the Project. The outreach events are social in nature, and they range from large dances and parties to smaller activity groups and video nights. They give young gay/bisexual men a chance to meet and socialize while also being exposed to safer sex messages. In addition, these Social Outreach Events provide opportunities to invite young gay/bisexual men to participate in M-groups and other Project activities.

**Outreach Team**

A group of young men conduct engaging, interactive, and creative performances at community venues and at the Project’s larger Social Outreach Events. Outreach Team performances involve a group of volunteers who go to settings frequented by young gay/bisexual men, including bars and gay community events, as well as larger outreach events that the Project sponsors. There they promote safer sex and testing using entertaining and often humorous approaches. As part of these performances, the Outreach Team distributes safer sex promotional materials developed by the Project. Other Outreach Team performances use the same approach to publicize the Project in general or advertise specific, upcoming outreach events.

**Outreach Materials**

The Project creates attractive and engaging printed materials to distribute to young gay/bisexual men. The materials promote HIV prevention by focusing on issues of special concern to young gay/bisexual men that may be barriers to safer sex and to testing.
Rationale for the use of Social Outreach Events

In designing the Mpowerment Project, we conducted extensive research into what accounts for high-risk sexual behavior among young gay/bisexual men. This research clearly shows that many young men are not sufficiently motivated by or interested in HIV prevention issues to seek help in changing risky sexual behavior (See Module 1: Overview). We learned, for example, that when community-based organizations offer safer sex workshops and other HIV-prevention services, very few young gay/bisexual men attend.

We also discovered that many young gay/bisexual men tend not to read safer sex promotional materials and are likely to throw them away. The reason for this is because many of these materials still contain the same sorts of messages found in more traditional HIV prevention materials. They often tell the reader how to behave (“use condoms,” “don’t have unsafe sex,” and so on), and these messages do not fully address the HIV prevention needs of most young gay/bisexual men.

In contrast to the lack of interest in HIV/AIDS, social concerns are highly motivating for young gay/bisexual men. They are very interested in opportunities to meet other men of their own age, and to find places besides bars and nightclubs where they can socialize. Many are seeking a sense of community and therefore desire stronger, more supportive social ties with other young men. So if the goal is to attract large numbers of young gay/bisexual men, it makes more sense to host a fun event than to offer a safer sex workshop. Once they have come together for a Social Outreach Event, the event provides an excellent opportunity to promote safer sex and testing and to recruit them into further involvement with the Project’s activities. Therefore, a focus on attracting young gay/bisexual men through addressing social concerns is one of the Project’s Guiding Principles. Although young gay/bisexual men want to feel connected to each other, there are relatively few physical spaces where they can gather. Gay bars and public cruising spots are often the only non-virtual places where young gay/bisexual men can meet and socialize. Usually these two venues do not lend themselves to developing a strong, supportive, and healthy community. In fact, both settings are problematic in meeting young gay/bisexual men’s social needs or in addressing at-risk sexual behavior. Generally bars only admit men who are 21 years of age or older, and they promote alcohol use that can facilitate opportunities to engage in sex while high. Engaging in sex while high has repeatedly been found to contribute to unsafe sex. Public cruising spots are often dangerous and limit social interaction. In addition, condoms are rarely available there.

Some communities have a university nearby, and many universities have a Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) student group on campus. However, these groups are often only open to college students. Even when student groups are open to the larger community, the groups are designed for students and typically focus on their particular needs, which may alienate non-students. Furthermore, university groups are frequently perceived as “too political” or “too out” for many young gay/bisexual men, or primarily focus on issues of importance to lesbians.

Social concerns are highly motivating for young gay/bisexual men, so attract them to your Project through addressing their social needs.
Being part of a supportive, health-promoting gay community, rather than only having a few gay friends, means that a young man can hear supportive messages about being gay, and about having safer sex and HIV testing from many people.
Social Outreach Events

Since most young gay/bisexual men will not seek out HIV prevention services, attracting them to Social Outreach Events is an excellent way of reaching them so that they can be recruited to attend M-groups, join the Core Group or volunteer with the Project. Social Outreach Events are also an excellent way to attract men who would never show up for any activity that is promoted as pertaining to HIV prevention. Our research showed that many young men who engage in unsafe sex were unlikely to attend M-groups, volunteer with the Project, or join the Core Group. However, they were more likely to attend Social Outreach Events, as well as being reached by their friends through informal, supportive conversations (See Module 8: Informal Outreach). Therefore, Social Outreach Events and Informal Outreach by their friends may be the best ways to reach many risk-taking men about safer sex and testing.

Planning and producing Social Outreach Events

It’s very important to create fun events in settings that will attract a diverse crowd of young gay/bisexual men where safer sex can also be promoted. Social Outreach Events must capture the attention of young gay/bisexual men in order to be effective. It is up to the event organizers to be as creative as possible in coming up with ideas and methods that will appeal to this age group. The following suggestions will help you to design and implement a successful Social Outreach Event.
Keep goals in mind

If conducted successfully, Social Outreach Events accomplish a number of important goals for the Project. Project Coordinators should keep these goals in mind when planning, implementing, and evaluating outreach events.

The Project facilitates the empowerment of young gay/bisexual men, so that ultimately they can help themselves and create solutions to their own issues. The goals of every Social Outreach Event reflect this Guiding Principle. Event goals (See below) pertain as much to the men who help plan and implement the events as to those who attend them. In fact, our research has demonstrated that working together on Mpowerment Project events is empowering for many men and increases their sense of community and social responsibility.

Goals of Social Outreach Events

- promote safer sex
- promote HIV testing
- attract young gay/bisexual men, including those who would not typically attend HIV prevention activities
- provide enjoyable social opportunities for young men to meet each other, build supportive friendships, and create a sense of community
- recruit men to M-groups
- recruit men to volunteer for other Project activities
- facilitate the empowerment of the Core Group and volunteers in planning the event and reflecting about it afterwards
- increase morale and team building among Core Group members
- create good publicity that attracts more men to the Project

Determine specific responsibilities

The Core Group decides what activities will take place. It is also the Core Group's job to make sure the activities actually happen, and that every Social Outreach Event promotes safer sex in some way. The number of people involved in planning and implementing each event may vary depending on the event's size and complexity. A large, community-wide event may require the careful attention of the Events Coordinator and an event committee, and a Team of volunteers may also be necessary. However, a single Core Group member may be able to plan and implement a video night or book group on his own. For large events, the Events Coordinator and event committee members are responsible for actually planning the details and carrying out the event. The Outreach Coordinator, together with the Outreach Team, is responsible for planning the details of safer sex promotion for each event. (The Outreach Team and ways to promote safer sex at outreach events are discussed in detail later in this module.)
To make sure a large Social Outreach Event is a success, the event committee must anticipate and pay attention to many details, while at the same time making sure that the event also meets the Project’s broader goals. Depending on the event, individual volunteers or subcommittees may need to plan its various aspects including the timeline, budget, publicity and materials, decorations, food, entertainment, and safer sex and testing promotion. To assist in this process, we have developed the Mpowerment Project Event Planning Form. We recommend using this form for all events. (See Module 12: Evaluation, figure 12.7 for a copy of the Mpowerment Project Social Outreach Event Planning Form.)

For smaller events, it is also important that the host anticipate and plan for all the necessary details, such as the recruitment of new participants into M-groups, having safer sex materials available, organizing the equipment needed, arranging for the Project space to be unlocked, etc. The Mpowerment Project Event Planning Form is useful for planning the smaller Social Outreach Events as well (See Module 12: Evaluation, figure 12.7 for a copy of the Mpowerment Project Social Outreach Event Planning Form).

Keep in mind that an important goal for the event is creating a sense of empowerment and community-building among the young men who plan and carry out the events. Remember—the process of planning and conducting the event is as important as the event itself. This is best accomplished through teamwork. As many participants as possible should have the opportunity to provide input in designing and carrying out the event. This will help them feel ownership of the event and of the Project itself, and will motivate them to speak with their friends to encourage them to join the Project.

Get input from the Core Group early on

Although it may seem easy to throw a successful party or other Social Outreach Event, each requires a great deal of planning and thought in order to accomplish Project goals. Planning is required regardless of the size of the event, although obviously more planning—and hence more time and effort—is required for larger events. Such planning often extends over several meetings.

The first step in planning a large Social Outreach Event is for the Core Group to work together as a team to develop a good idea. The best themes for Social Outreach Events arise when the Core Group takes the time to brainstorm and discuss a variety of options during a Core Group meeting. The Project Coordinators can best facilitate this brainstorming process by encouraging each Core Group member to suggest ideas, regardless of how outlandish they are. Generally, no feedback or evaluation is offered during the brainstorming process. This helps encourage creativity and innovative thinking. The most ridiculous suggestion may spark an idea that has tremendous potential for a great outreach event. One Coordinator can write up every idea on a flip chart, while someone else facilitates the discussion.

After the Core Group generates a large list of ideas, a quick group discussion can eliminate those suggestions that no one is really interested in. After paring down the large list of all the ideas to one of a more manageable size,
the Coordinators can facilitate a group discussion on the pros and cons of each idea. After this discussion, each Core Group member votes on his top 3 to 5 choices. The suggestions that get the most votes then become the “finalists.”

Before making the final decision about which idea to use, we suggest that Core Group members test market the ideas with other young gay/bisexual men in the community. The easiest way to do this is simply by having Core Group members talk with their friends between Core Group meetings to see which of the ideas they like the best. The Core Group members should also note any additional ideas their friends suggest. This process helps everyone feel involved, starts publicizing the event, and is much more likely to result in success.

When the Core Group returns for the next meeting, each member can share his experiences and feedback about the various ideas, and the Core Group can then decide which event to produce. We recommend that the Coordinators save the list of suggestions, because this list can be used to select future events as well. In fact, reminding the Core Group that the “runner-up” ideas can become themes for future events often helps speed up the decision-making process.

Having the Core Group spend time creating an event is important because it helps them develop critical analysis skills. Learning to be reflective about goals and objectives of Social Outreach Events, who attends, and how to integrate HIV prevention into an event can help members to be more analytical about their own lives.

Here are key issues for the Core Group to consider in planning an event:

- What is the size and budget of the event?
- What are the goals of the event? How will we know if they are achieved?
- Who in the community will the event appeal to?
- What groups of young men might be alienated by the event?
- What are the opportunities for promoting safer sex and/or HIV testing at the event?
- What “party favors”/safer sex promotional materials will be given out?
- What events may be happening in the community on the same date that may compete with a Project-sponsored event, or that offer possibilities for collaboration?
- Is the location accessible to young gay/bisexual men, in an appealing location, and near public transportation?
- How will participants at the event be informed about the Mpowerment Project and be invited to become volunteers or attend M-groups?
- Is there sufficient time to plan and carry out the event?
Choose dates carefully

Make sure there are no competing events happening that will draw away lots of young men from your event. For example, it is not a good idea to schedule a big party the week before final exams at a local university if a sizable proportion of the men in the young gay/bisexual men’s community is attending college. During popular holidays like Halloween or Christmas it is sometimes better to hold holiday themed events weeks before the holiday itself. This way the Project can host the first holiday event of the season. This leaves the busier holiday schedule free for men who may have other commitments to family and friends. Similarly, it is not advisable to schedule a discussion group at the same time as television programs that are the most popular with these young men. Sometimes it may be possible to schedule a Project event on the same day as another event by collaborating with organizers of those activities.

Use a team approach, but also designate an event chair

Once an initial idea and date are chosen for each event, an event chair should be designated to oversee and coordinate it. For larger events, usually the Events Coordinator serves as the event chair unless there is a long-term, very reliable Core Group member who wants to volunteer. The event chair then organizes the event committee—a team comprised of Core Group members and interested volunteers who plan and conduct the event. Reliable Core Group members can also be recruited to host smaller, weekly or ongoing events.

For large events, the event committee should involve many young gay/bisexual men in the work of organizing and carrying it out. Working together on an Event Planning Team while having fun is a great way for Project volunteers to get to know each other and serves as a team building experience. It also creates a sense of ownership of the event, which then extends to the Project and its goals. Furthermore, having a team of participants attend to an event’s details is a great way for men who have never before organized complex events to gain valuable experience.

An effective event chair will:

- determine which skills will be useful in producing the event
- find out what special skills volunteers have who are on the event committee
- invite volunteers to be involved in the areas needed for the event
- support and recognize the work of the volunteers throughout the planning process
- One volunteer may have DJ experience, while another may be skilled with decorations. The goal is to fully involve as many people as possible so they feel a sense of ownership while putting on the event, and pride and accomplishment after an event is over.
- When events are carefully executed, it is likely that volunteers will have had a good time working on them, experience effective HIV prevention promotion, and come away with a positive view of the Project. This positive experience increases the likelihood they will want to become more involved with the Project and tell their friends about it. For all of these reasons, we believe the process of planning and creating a Social Outreach Event is as important as the event itself.
Make a timeline

Once you have selected a date for large or mid-sized events, make a detailed timeline of everything that needs to be done. (See Figure 7.1. in the Appendix to this module for a Sample Timeline for Social Outreach Event Planning.) There are a tremendous number of details that need to be attended to, particularly when planning larger events. (For smaller events, a checklist may suffice.) These include such things as publicity, safer sex promotion and/or testing promotion, refreshments, entertainment, and decorations. Many of the details are dependent upon other details being worked out. For example, if you want to advertise an upcoming event in a newspaper, you need to know the deadline for placing the ad. If a newspaper comes out monthly, the advertisement or calendar announcement deadlines may be six weeks or more before the event. In order to meet that deadline, you would need to know even earlier the name, time, date, and location of the event, and allow sufficient time to develop an attractive looking advertisement.

Strive for variety, especially in mid-size and larger Social Outreach Events

Since Social Outreach Events are often the most visible aspect of the Project, in many ways they define the Project in the eyes of the young gay/bisexual men’s community. The key to planning an effective program of outreach events is variety. Young gay/bisexual men have very diverse tastes. No one event will appeal to everyone. Make sure your monthly calendar of events offers enough different types of activities so that every young man can find something that appeals to him.

Here’s a case in point: if the Project only sponsored athletic activities, men who do not enjoy or feel comfortable participating in athletic events would not participate. Likewise, if all events featured balls, young men uninterested in the ball scene would not attend. This is a complaint we have heard from many Projects: a type of event may be enormously appealing to one segment of the community, but fails to reach other groups of men. A Project that offers only one type of event may even alienate other young men in the community as the Project becomes defined by that activity, and therefore by the segment of the community that likes that event. By offering a variety of events, you will reach different segments of young gay/bisexual men in your area. If you do, it is more likely you will be able to spread the norm of safer sex and knowing your HIV status throughout the young gay/bisexual men’s community.
Yet, there is one activity we have seen that does work to hold repeatedly: Mpowerment Detroit hosts a large social gathering and home cooked dinner every Sunday evening that attracts many young African American men. Dinner is provided, and a safer sex promotional activity is held every week, which can include breaking into discussion groups or role playing about how to respond to difficult situations. There is always variety in the activity that is conducted at the gathering. Because this Social Outreach Event is held every Sunday, young men know that it will occur and plan on attending. Culturally this activity is successful because many young Black men go to church earlier in the day, but then want an activity where they can be with each other later. In addition, many people traditionally spend Sundays with family. For this reason, it feels right to many young men to also spend at least part of the day with their “gay family” or community.

**Tackle events that are achievable**  
In order to help Project volunteers gain experience and develop teamwork, try organizing some smaller Social Outreach Events before producing your first large one. Smaller events are usually easier to carry out, and therefore build a sense of competency among the event organizers. Therefore, focus the event on something you are likely to do well and keep the planning simple. Examples include video and television nights, volleyball games, beach outings, small barbeques or picnics, hikes, and discussion groups.

Larger Social Outreach Events, such as parties and dances, generally require considerable time, energy, and money to produce. The more complex an event, the greater the chances that not all parts will be carried out successfully. Nothing can more quickly destroy a growing sense of empowerment among volunteers and the Project’s reputation during the first few months of its existence than a large, well-publicized event that flops.

Having said that, it is also true that producing a larger event early on in the Project can generate a lot of interest in the community and begin disseminating information about it quickly. So we would not advocate putting off a large event for many months if it seems that the Core Group and volunteers can handle it.

**Carefully select event size and frequency**  
It is very difficult for a Project to produce successful large Social Outreach Events more frequently than once every six weeks. Even for Projects that are fully staffed and have strong Core Groups, one large Social Outreach Event every other month and about two or three smaller activities each week is considered a full schedule. One advantage in putting on a number of smaller events each week is that there is usually some activity going on all the time. Not only does this convey the impression to young gay/bisexual men that the Project is exciting, but it also helps maintain the Project’s momentum.

The types of social interactions that occur in larger versus smaller events are different and complement each other in important ways. Large events can be more conducive to attracting young gay/bisexual men who are new to the Project, but the social interactions that occur at larger events may be more superficial. Smaller events are more conducive to participants getting to
Every event, large or small, provides an opportunity for men to express support to each other about having safer sex and knowing their current HIV status. Project Coordinators and Core Group members can encourage and be role models by expressing support to others about HIV prevention at Social Outreach Events.

know one another on a personal level and developing supportive friendships, but may not draw in as many new men to the Project.

The opportunities for safer sex promotion also vary in different size groups. In larger groups, an interactive and theatrical safer sex performance might be appropriate, whereas a smaller group might lend itself better to a topical discussion. The safer sex promotion at small, informal events housed in the Project space may be as simple as having a display of safer sex posters and providing condoms and lube in various places in the space, such as the main meeting space and the Project’s bathroom (See Also Module 6: Project Space).

Another important reason to hold Social Outreach Events is to recruit young men to M-groups (See Also Module 9: M-groups). Larger events can be especially helpful for M-group recruitment because they attract more new men to the Project. A team of men might be needed for collecting men’s names and contact information for subsequent recruitment to M-groups at a large Social Outreach Event, whereas only one man might be needed to recruit men to groups at small events.

**Vary the schedule** Remember to vary the days and times that ongoing Social Outreach Events are scheduled. Many young men have work or school commitments that prevent them from attending events at certain times. Although there will never be a perfect time for everyone, by varying the schedule no one will be completely excluded from attending.

**Be resourceful** In designing Social Outreach Events, the Project should carefully assess the physical resources the community offers and draw upon them (See Also Module 2: Community Assessment). In many locations, there is at least one coffee shop, cafe or other public meeting space that is either gay owned or gay friendly. These locations can serve as ad hoc meeting spaces where men can engage in supportive conversations, plan events for the Project, have fun, and support a locally owned business. An ongoing activity in a location such as this can be listed on the monthly calendar as a place where newcomers are welcomed and can cost virtually nothing for the Project to sponsor.

The local gay bar(s) offers another potentially cost-effective meeting place for Project events. Therefore it is worth exploring whether a bar may be interested in cosponsoring some Project events. Events at bars can vary tremendously by planning special theme parties and offering entertainment that will appeal to young gay/bisexual men. Typically, both bar owners and regular bar patrons appreciate it whenever a special event is held that draws lots of young gay/bisexual men into the bar. If the bar offers an attractive space and has good lighting and a great sound system, it may make more sense financially if the Project sometimes collaborates with the bar in producing special events, rather than trying to compete with the bar by staging events in other venues. Admittedly, the downside of using a bar for Project events is that those under 21 might not be able to attend. Sometimes, however, a bar can make special arrangements to admit underage patrons by sponsoring an all ages night or stamping the hands of those 21 and over (the laws in some states allow this, but other states do not).
Being resourceful also means seeking out the advice and ideas of people in the community who may not be involved with the Mpowerment Project, but who are experts at organizing the type of event you are planning. Not only will the Project benefit, but you will be helping to build networks and coalitions for the Project within the community.

Use the Project space

If your Project has its own space that is comfortable and accessible, having outreach events there is an excellent way to introduce newcomers to the range of activities the Project offers. For the young men who attend the event, it also creates in their minds a positive association between the Project and having fun.

For example, in Dayton, OH, the Mu Crew had what they called a “Black and White Ball” that they held at their Project space. Everything from decorations to costumes and even refreshments was black and white. A disco ball hung from the ceiling and the Project served black and white food like Oreos and chocolate covered pretzels. They had a video game tournament, played music, and took advantage of their great space.

The Austin Men’s Project Core Group held a Haunted House and a Halloween carnival party, and turning the Project space into a Haunted House was a challenge. All the furniture was either moved into one room and stacked safely, or stored in a U-Haul trailer rented for the weekend. The interior walls of the entire house were covered with black plastic, and new maze-like walls were constructed out of PVC pipe frame with black plastic stretched over the entire structure. The new walls demarcated small areas, and these were the rooms of the haunted house. Each area had its own theme, including a room that had spray foam “brains” hung from the ceiling accompanied by disturbing buzzing fly noises; a room with hands grasping through the walls; a jumping alien; a long, pitch black hallway; a witch; a Satanic priest with a hidden scary attendant that jumped out at people; and a chainsaw killer.

Project WOW in Newark, NJ held several mini-balls at their space, which consisted of a very large room, with several smaller rooms for offices. They created a runway for ball contestants to walk on, with sitting areas on either side. The space was crowded and the excitement at the events was palpable as contestants vied for prizes. Judges were seated at the end of the walkway area.

Numerous events were held at the Project space in Albuquerque. The first event, which became an annual event, was the “We are Family Picnic.”
event was held immediately following Albuquerque’s gay pride parade, and the Project space was decorated with a multitude of rainbows across the ceilings, walls, and tables in keeping with the theme of gay pride week. A picnic was held in the backyard of the space. Another event, “Viva Las Vegas,” was also held in the Project space, and each room was decorated to represent a different casino and casino activity. (Both events are described more fully below).

**Consider providing refreshments**

Since free refreshments are nearly always a draw for young men, many Projects provide some type of food for participants at events. These can range from entire meals, which is what Mpowerment Detroit offers at their weekly Sunday socials, to very light refreshments, which is what many other Projects offer. Light refreshments can include drinks and popcorn and chips. Whether or not to provide entire meals depends on Project budgets, as well as the cultural meaning of sharing food. Several Projects have expressed the sentiment that “providing food is not an option: our community gathers around food.”
Examples of large Social Outreach Events (More than 100 men)

Note: The following examples are general descriptions and do not include all the important details of every event. It is critical that safer sex (or other appropriate HIV prevention) and community-building messages and activities have a central role in each large Social Outreach Event. Concrete ideas about safer sex promotion at Social Outreach Events are discussed later in this module.

**Speed Dating**

The Mpowerment Project in Anchorage, AK, called Adam and Steve, initiated a series of speed dating events that were very successful. They made arrangements with a local restaurant that had an open yet private upper mezzanine area where the participants could mingle. Each table had information about Adam and Steve as well as safer sex packets. The speed dating events had different themes, such as a Wizard of Oz theme, with Wizard of Oz safer sex related questions and a Friends of Dorothy related skit.

**Red Carpet Affair**

Mpowerment Detroit hosted what they called the “Red Carpet Affair” in their space. It was loosely based on the celebrity runway scene for the Oscar ceremony. The event was presented as an opportunity for men to showcase their gifted fashion sense. Since there are few opportunities in Detroit for men to show off their fashion creations, they created such an opportunity through this event. It was so popular that they decided to produce it every year, although each year it was varied to maintain interest. The first year men who wanted to “walk the runway” had to come dressed in an outfit that they had created. The next year, “Old Hollywood” was the theme. At the end of the runway, men were asked to give an interview and one of the interview questions centered on safer sex. For example, they were asked, “What’s hot about a guy who is into playing safe?” The guys in the audience got to choose their favorite outfit and participants were given awards for their effort.

**Club M**

The Core Group in Eugene, OR initiated a very popular series of dance parties called Club M, which were the largest outreach events the Project sponsored, and occurred every other month for several months. The Project rented a large empty warehouse for the parties, which the Core Group creatively transformed into a trendy nightclub space. They completely covered the walls with black plastic sheets, and where needed, erected artificial walls also covered with black plastic. They set up a stage, sound system, and lights, and also enlisted volunteer go-go dancers. Outreach Team members dressed up in costumes representing different brands of condoms, and performed a sketch at each event. During one such performance, the volunteers demolished a wall of hate built from blocks with homophobic messages that were written on one side of them, and then rebuilt a wall of pride by turning each block around to show the pride messages that were written on the opposite side. Admission was free and open to all, but the
events were marketed very clearly to young gay/bisexual men. Club M events were very popular, attracting about 200 to 300 young gay/bisexual men.

**Brokeback Mountain Party**  In San Juan, Puerto Rico, Guateke threw a big party with a Brokeback Mountain theme. All the publicity focused on Ennis and Jack (the main characters) and the safer sex messages were all puns on how to safely ride a stud.

**Big Gay Beach Day**  In Charleston, SC, the CHAMP Project hosted beach parties that attracted around 300 young gay/bisexual men. The beach day was scheduled shortly after pride events in the area took place, allowing outreach for the event to take place at various pride functions. They had a professional DJ spin records on the beach, and the Core Group came up with 20 different messages that were prerecorded and played throughout the day in between songs. Some messages had a safer sex theme to them, while others were simple invitations to get more involved in the Project.

**We Are Family Picnics**  In Albuquerque, for their first large event, MPower hosted a barbecue at the Project space that drew more than 150 young gay/bisexual men. One year later the theme was repeated, and again attracted well over 100 men. The picnics were held immediately following the local gay pride parade. Invitations to the picnics were distributed at the weeklong festivities that preceded the parade. During the second year, the Project entered a float in the parade and won first prize! The theme of both the float and MPower’s barbecue party was “We Are Family” to emphasize the diversity and solidarity of the emerging young gay/bisexual men’s community. It was also a theme that resonated with the many young Hispanic men in the community, since family is very important in many Latino cultures. The Project space was decorated with a multitude of rainbows across the ceilings, walls, and tables in keeping with the theme of gay pride week. Core Group members warmly greeted all men who attended at the door. The Project provided some of the food and community members donated the rest.

**Joker’s Wild**  In Roanoke, VA, Roanoke Mpowerment hosted a large event in a local bar at the end of March, just before April Fools’ Day (hence, the Joker’s Wild theme). The party had a Mardi Gras feel to it, and they handed out simple masks for people to wear as they entered the bar.

**Uniformity**  In Santa Barbara, CA, Pride Mission threw a party called Uniformity that attracted about 150 young gay/bisexual men. The party was held at a rented space and focused on the theme of “Men in Uniforms (and those who love them).” Men were invited to come dressed in uniforms worn by various working people, including doctors, police officers, fast food workers, military, and so forth.
**Homo-Coming**

In Orange County, CA, Mpower OC (Orange County) had a homecoming dance that attracted well over 100 young men. The event was held at their Project space, and they brought in a stage, had tables with tablecloths, provided food, and played music. They heavily promoted the event at local gay venues. Since the theme was “homecoming,” they dressed up as schoolboys for the outreach, with shorts and ties and dress shoes and school bags. The outreach created quite a buzz and the men had a blast doing it. During the event, members circulated among the participants, talked to them about Mpower OC, invited them to get involved with the Project, and recruited men to M-groups. Condoms, lube, and safer sex images were everywhere since it was held at the Project space.

**Lava Luau**

The Austin Men’s Project sponsored an annual Hawaiian Luau-themed pool party that drew between 170 to 250 men. The theme was revised each year. The first year the theme was just Lava Luau with Outreach Team members wearing Hawaiian shirts and grass skirts. In year two, the theme was Lava Luau 2 with a “ship-wrecked-survivors” theme culled from the current Abercrombie and Fitch catalogue. The following year the theme was Lava Luau: “I’m a survivor!” that capitalized on the popular TV show and the Destiny’s Child song. Event promotional outreach changed with each theme, and the theme influenced the safer sex promotion at the event.

**Gay Prom**

In Newark, NJ, Project WOW hosted a gay prom with a “Free to Be You and Me” theme. One year earlier, a 15-year-old lesbian was murdered in the city, and the youth who were part of Project WOW wanted to honor the anniversary of her death by creating an environment where everyone could be themselves and still feel safe. They worked with other gay groups in the area, including local university groups, to promote the prom, which was very successful.

**Haunted House Halloween Party**

The Austin Project put on a Haunted House event, described briefly earlier. A large group of volunteers built the Haunted House and decorated the yard for the party. A volunteer, or group of volunteers, took responsibility for “haunting” each room, which included decorating and acting in their particular room or area of the Haunted House. In turn, they recruited other men to act in the Haunted House, either as a character in a room, jumping out and scaring someone, or being invisible hands that reached out from the wall. After the Haunt, everyone gathered in the backyard of the house for a Halloween carnival party. The Outreach Team planned the event and the corresponding safer sex promotion activities.
Examples of medium-sized Social Outreach Events (30-100 men)

**House parties**

For Projects that have their own space, house parties are a relatively easy and popular outreach event. They also offer two advantages over events held elsewhere. First, they avoid the cost of renting a separate space. Second, they draw people to the Project space so they are more likely to learn about some of the other activities the Project sponsors. Depending on the size of the space, house parties have accommodated between 30 and 100 people. Typically they are held on a weekend night and revolve around a particular theme. The party decorations and activities usually reflect this theme.

For example, in Atlanta, Da CRIBB (Creating Rich Intelligent Black Bruthas) hosted a mini ball at their Project space. Participants walked in a variety of categories and the community came together to support the participants and learn about the Project. In Nashua, NH, Code M hosted a house party called Frostbite that took place after the winter holiday season. It gave the men a chance to reconnect after the usual holiday madness. In Nashville, TN, Exodus Mpowerment held a Valentine’s Day event to give both single men and couples a place to go and celebrate their love for themselves and their community. Albuquerque continued the “We Are Family” theme during the winter by holding a “Home for the Holidays” party, for which the Project space was decorated like a North Pole chalet. Core Group members dressed like sexy gay elves and toy soldiers. The Project space was decorated with a Christmas tree and Christmas lights. One young man dressed up as both a “naughty” and a “nice” Santa (accomplished through a simple change of costume.)

**Events held at a park**

There are good reasons to hold Social Outreach Events in a park. A park can be an easier space to hold some activities in (e.g., picnics, sporting events), can hold more men than a Project space, and can take advantage of good weather. In Santa Barbara, Pride Mission sponsored an afternoon garden party at a local park called “Prideshead Revisited” in the spirit of the old television series, “Brideshead Revisited.” The event featured lawn games such as croquet, picnic food, music, and a chance for 75 men to mingle and have fun in a pleasant, relaxing setting. In Albuquerque, MPower sponsored “Groove is in the Park,” a spring picnic that included games such as volleyball, races, a frozen t-shirt contest, and an unconventional but very gay-friendly Spring egg hunt with plastic eggs containing safer sex messages, candy, and condoms. This picnic attracted 80 young men. In Texas, the Austin Men’s Project sponsored an annual Olympic Games-themed event called the Camp AMP Gay Games. The event featured games like football and volleyball, activities like tug of war, water races, sand castle building, and a sack race, along with music, a barbecue cookout, an inflatable castle/trampoline, and a show-stopping safer sex Outreach Team performance.
Examples of small Social Outreach Events (10-30 men)

In most communities, a Project Coordinator or individual members of the Core Group usually hosts small events. During events at the Project space, call new participants’ attention to the calendars, posters, condoms, referral lists, and other resources and make sure that participants know they can take materials with them when they leave. If small events take place at other venues, a selection of appropriate safer sex, testing, and Project promotional materials can be made available for the participants. As with other Social Outreach Events, it is vital to collect the names and contact information of each new participant at the small events, and to follow up with them soon after the event to recruit them into the Project and to M-groups. Refreshments such as juice, soda, chips, fruit, or popcorn are either provided by the host or brought by the participants.

For video or television parties, showing a short gay-themed or safer sex informational video or clip as a preview to the feature fits in nicely with the event. For other small events, such as book clubs or discussion groups (described below), introducing the topic of safer sex somewhere into the discussion is usually not difficult. These types of activities are often held at the Project space, where there are numerous visual reminders to practice safer sex including posters, leaflets, condoms, and lubes. Thus one advantage to holding activities at the Project space is that these materials are around and reinforce the message of safer sex.

**Movie nights**

In each community, weekly video nights have been popular. Most communities have chosen to select gay-related films for viewing, although occasionally showing camp and horror films have also been successful. In Lafayette, LA, the Mpowerment Project called their video night “Q-tube.” In Detroit, they called it “Knights Together.” Austin Men’s Project occasionally showed homemade videos of Outreach Team performances during video nights. In Albuquerque, Friday nights were reserved for gay-related movies, and Sundays for science fiction films.

It is important to recognize that movie nights are not solely about providing entertainment. As with other Social Outreach Events, they provide opportunities for Informal Outreach and community-building to occur, and any new men who show up for movie nights should be recruited to M-groups and invited to volunteer with the Project. Movie nights can also provide opportunities to further analyze important issues of relevance to the young men’s lives. For example, questions can be asked of the group following a movie, such as, “What was the overall message of the movie? Did you see any unsafe sexual practices in the movie? Based on the sexual nature of the movie, what would you rename the movie? Would you add or delete any characters and why?” The selection of movies for movie nights events should take into account the messages conveyed in them.

For example, an Mpowerment Project for young gay/bisexual African American men once showed a movie that only portrayed African Americans in a negative light. The film focused on drug use and addiction, but did not
provide any messages about how to change the situation. After the film showing, the TV was turned off and the men in the room simply turned to other activities. Thus, the Project lost an important educational opportunity to have the men analyze the movie’s content and discuss possible solutions to the problems portrayed in the film.

**Television nights** There is often a television program that is popular with young gay/bisexual men, either because of the topic or because it has a gay character. Building a weekly event around watching a television program is a simple, effective, and inexpensive way to bring a group of young men together. In addition to ongoing shows, sometimes parties can be organized around popular TV specials such as the Emmys, the Academy Awards, Grammy Awards, Super Bowl, BET Awards, or MTV Awards. We have found that low-key events such as television nights or occasional special TV events are often the first Project-sponsored activity that new men will attend.

**Book clubs** A book club is a good way of attracting some men in a format that allows for a deeper analysis of some issues. If there is a book that is attracting a lot of attention among young gay/bisexual men, or a topic that is of great interest to them, then a book club can be organized to focus on the book or topic. Men attending the group can collectively decide which book to read, how often to meet, and how much to read between meetings. However, based on experiences from Mpowerment Projects, book clubs often do not work well after the group has read and discussed more than one or two books because attendance becomes spotty. Therefore, we suggest that Projects not sponsor a book club as a recurring activity. A book club can be started up again after some time passes between reading books. One Project merged their struggling book club with another “all ages” men’s book club that was also struggling with attendance. Once combined, they were able to maintain the book group with good attendance, and everyone said they benefitted from the input into the discussions by men of all ages.

**Poker or game nights** Creating a space to play dominos, cards, or board games is a relatively simple event that can be an excellent way for young men to have fun together in a safe, supportive environment that indirectly promotes messages of safer sex (with promotional posters on the walls, and condoms and lube freely available). Knowing that every week provides an opportunity to play hearts, spades, or bid whist with other young gay/bisexual men can attract men to the Project on a regular basis.

**Outdoor and sports activities** Volleyball, basketball, rollerblading, hiking trips, bicycle rides, ice skating, or whatever else your community offers as outdoor recreational opportunities can be enjoyable for many men. At Project WOW in Newark, NJ, they sometimes sponsored water balloon fights during the hot summer months. At CHAMP in Charleston, they hosted what they called the Gay Open, which was centered around golf. The Austin Men’s Project hosted football games. Some men liked participating in the football game, whereas other men preferred to be onlookers or
cheerleaders. In Albuquerque, the Project collaborated with a local GLBT friendly martial arts school that offered members free training.

**Field trips**

Many of the outdoor activities mentioned above can also be promoted as “field trips.” Many Mpowerment Projects around the country have planned field trips, such as Adam and Steve in Anchorage that organized an outing called “Neon Bowling” because everything in the bowling center was lit using black lights. Other field trips that have been successful include miniature golf, bingo, laser tag, scavenger hunts, and even group treks to the movie theatre. Sometimes Projects paid part or all of the costs for the activities, but often the participants covered their own costs. Often participants first meet at the Project center and then go as a group on the field trip.

**Discussion groups**

A weekly or biweekly discussion group can be very attractive to some men. In Detroit, the event Coordinators called their discussion groups “VENT (Voicing Everything Not Told).” Through these discussions, they would try to address topics such as: “What is it like being a Black gay male in Detroit?” The Project in Honolulu hosted regular discussion groups called “Chitty Cha Cha.” Topics included how and where to meet other guys, moving from dating to being boyfriends, monogamous vs. open sexual relationships, long-term relationships, and intergenerational relationships.

On Thursday nights at Da CRIBB in Atlanta, the Project held discussions called “Real Talk.” Everyone who came was given a pad of paper and a pen to write down proposed questions or topics of conversation. The pieces of paper were then placed in a jug so that they were anonymous. Questions could be about anything, such as “Why are there so many bottoms?” or “Can you tell if someone is a top or a bottom by what clothes they wear?” Someone then read the questions or comments out loud and they discussed some of them as a group. Albuquerque’s MPower held an ongoing “Coffee Talk” which addressed any issue that someone in the group wanted to bring up. Sometimes the men would discuss topics that affected nearly all of them, such as coming out to one’s family. At other times more provocative issues came up, such as whether or not gay/bisexual men should raise children.

The discussion group format lends itself well to explorations of issues that are important to young gay/bisexual men. Based on feedback from Mpowerment Projects around the country, certain issues seem to resonate with a majority of these men. For example, what do young men want from different types of relationships? How does a man’s body image affect how he views himself and what he does sexually? When and how do young men feel objectified by other gay/bisexual men? How can men plan ahead to be safe sexually when they go to bars specifically looking to “hook up” with someone that evening? The format of discussions groups, or small community forums (discussed more below), can provide opportunities to get into “heavier,” more in-depth discussions of important issues for young gay/bisexual men. Therefore we strongly recommend that Projects organize discussion groups, while at the same time we realize that not all men will want to attend them. It is worth noting here that while initially men may only attend a Project’s fun
events, after awhile many decide to participate in events that offer them an opportunity to do something they don’t often get to do—talk with other young men about issues that are important to them.

Discussion groups can also be used for an entirely different purpose—to secure input from men who are not part of the Core Group on proposed Project activities and outreach. For example, Mpowerment Detroit also used its VENT discussion sessions to come up with “tag lines” to use on publicity materials for the sessions. The tag line the Project ended up using to describe the VENT Sessions actually came out of one of them: “to empower young gay and bisexual men who have sex with men of color by giving them opportunities to express their ideas and concerns and allowing them to make changes to affect the community.”

Community forums

In many communities, forums on topics of interest to young gay/bisexual men can be popular. They have included such topics as dating and relationships, oral sex, racism, substance use, and body image. Forums can be an effective means of provoking self-reflection, and the discussion offers young men opportunities to hear and learn from each other. As with other Social Outreach Events, HIV prevention is not usually the main topic at a forum, but risk reduction can be woven into the forum’s main topic. Some of the most successful forums have utilized entertaining, interactive exercises as well as discussion.

Depending on the topic and community, forums can attract from 20 to 100 young men. Smaller forums have been held in the Project space, while larger ones have been held on university campuses, and at places such as gay community centers, community theaters, and Metropolitan Community Churches. These are described in greater detail below.

Small forums

Many Projects sponsor smaller forums at their Project spaces which focus on special interest topics. The intent is for these to be for a larger group of men than the small discussion groups, and for the topic to be planned ahead of time. Some of the topics described in the previous section on Discussion Groups are suitable for small forums. Forums may use outside speakers or a panel of discussants to present diverse views on an issue. Subsequent to these presentations, there can be a discussion by attendees. Some Projects that target young men from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have also hosted workshops on life skills issues,
such as how to balance a checkbook, apply for a job, hold down a job, and understanding apartment rental leases.

**Larger forums** Forums that are designed to attract larger numbers of men can be set up in a number of ways. One effective method—although more traditional—is to arrange for a moderator and several panelists to participate. The panelists, representing different perspectives on an issue, first present their views on a topic, followed by questions and a group discussion. Forums using this format usually have a serious tone. For example, San Francisco’s STOP AIDS Project sponsored forums on methamphetamine use and barebacking. Forums can also focus on serious topics while using methods that are more interactive, lively, and entertaining. Whether the forums are serious or entertaining, be sure to give a great deal of thought to their planning. It will be necessary not only to consider what topics will be covered, but also how HIV prevention can be worked into the discussion.

**Use playful themes** MPower in Albuquerque held three large community forums that each attracted 40 to 50 young men. The first one, “The Body Beautiful,” focused on young gay/bisexual men’s concerns about body image. The second, called “Man Hunt,” explored how “to find your man in the urban jungle.” In the third one, “Fantasy Island,” participants shared their fetishes and fantasies. These events were fun— not only for the young men who attended them—but also for the men who staged them. Each forum featured entertaining skits and good music, and offered men numerous opportunities to meet one another. All three were designed to delve into these challenging issues, but in humorous and engaging ways.

For example, the Man Hunt forum featured a dating game in which the contestant asked three eligible bachelors questions about a variety of topics, including their sexual practices. Inevitably this led to the subject of safer and unsafe sexual practices (e.g., the bachelor who expressed a lack of concern about engaging in safer sex was not selected). The forums were scripted out in advance, with individuals acting out particular characters in the skits or activities. In The Body Beautiful forum a young man dressed up in drag to assume the role of a talk show host and moderated the event. At one point the host sought questions and comments from the audience. Cleverly, some volunteers with the Project acted as audience “plants” and asked specific questions that moved the discussion to issues of HIV prevention.

**Be entertaining while also being thought-provoking** To appeal to the desire of young men to have fun, find creative ways to present ideas and to get men to be more analytical about what they are doing in their lives through games, activities, and interactive exercises. At MPowerment Detroit, the Core Group created small folders, each with a different image of a guy on the front. The folders were taped to a wall, and participants were asked to go up and choose a folder. Inside the folder, the Core Group had created little bios about the guy pictured on the front, including sexual health history and sexual likes/dislikes. The participants were then broken up into groups to discuss what they thought about the
sexual history of the young man pictured on the front of their chosen folder, including assumptions and stereotypes.

One engaging approach has been playing “stand-up, sit-down” exercises. Project volunteers who had already served as moderators at various community forums in Albuquerque led the following exercise:

**Moderator:** “Stand up if you’ve ever met a date through a personals ad or on the Internet.”

*A group of men stood up.*

**Moderator:** “OK, stay standing if the guy lied about how he looked.”

*A number of men sit down.*

**Moderator:** “Now keep standing if you lied about the way you looked!”

In another example from Albuquerque, the line of questioning went as follows:

**Moderator:** “Stand up if you’re single. Okay, now look around, check for a ring. Now stay up if you’d like to meet someone here tonight. Well, you’re in luck, because we’ve got a little project for you. Go find two people here who you don’t know and who share your astrological sign.”

Games like the interactive ones described above are fun for the men taking part, keep the atmosphere lively, and can also help men explore sensitive issues in a comfortable atmosphere.
HIV prevention at Social Outreach Events

**Promoting safer sex at Social Outreach Events**

Every Social Outreach Event should include some type of safer sex promotional activity. Testing can also be promoted, although we do not advocate dropping the emphasis on safer sex. In the desire to develop a fun and exciting event, it is easy for the Core Group or the Outreach Team to overlook safer sex promotion. There are four things that differentiate “having a party” from “having an outreach event,” and they are listed below:

- conducting some type of safer sex promotional activity at each event
- signing up men to attend M-groups
- always collecting names and contact information of men attending events so that they can be recruited for future M-groups
- encouraging men to volunteer for other Project activities

It is important that safer sex and testing promotion contributes to the spirit of the event, rather than detracts from it. Otherwise, the young men attending the event may not attend future events or want to become further involved with the Project. The type of event will determine the type of safer sex promotion that is appropriate. The Core Group and Outreach Team should decide what form the safer sex promotion will take and who will be responsible for it. For example, large dance parties are not conducive to in-depth conversations about how to negotiate using condoms with a boyfriend. However, they may be effective places for theatrical performances about safer sex. In this instance, the Outreach Team would be in charge of putting together the safer sex promotional activity. In contrast, a community forum on dating might be the perfect place for conversations about how to negotiate using condoms with a new boyfriend. In this case, the event organizer for the forum would make sure that safer sex was included. Each of these approaches to safer sex promotion has an important place in the Mpowerment Project. *(How to promote safer sex at medium and large outreach events is discussed in more detail later in this module under Outreach Team Performances.)*

**Recruiting men to M-groups and into the Mpowerment Project**

Every Social Outreach Event not only offers an opportunity to promote safer sex and testing, but should also be regarded as an opportunity to recruit men to M-groups. As described in *Module 9: M-groups*, collecting names and contact information to recruit men to M-groups is an ongoing challenge. Therefore, it is important to take advantage of every opportunity to do so. In addition, every Social Outreach Event also provides an opportunity to encourage men to become more involved with the Project, which empowers participants. Furthermore, as more young men join the Project, it makes it possible for the Project to reach new social networks of young gay/bisexual men through their Informal...
Outreach to friends. This “diffusion process” (one of the Project’s Guiding Principles) exposes more men to social norms supportive of safer sex, which is why it is so important to continually interest new men in the Project. Therefore, it is crucial that every young man who shows up for an activity for the first time be approached and asked for his name and contact information. Different non-threatening ways of doing this are described below.

**An active approach to recruiting is best**

Men can be actively recruited to become more involved with the Project in various ways, depending upon the nature of the Social Outreach Event. The Coordinators can approach new men, describe the M-groups, and invite them to sign up for one. Often they can be scheduled right then and there. Additionally, interest sheets (See Module 5: Core Group, Figure 5.2) that ask for names, contact information, skills, and interests can be given to newcomers. (On a side note, you may want to keep a stack of interest sheets handy at the Project space as well. When new men drop by the space, you can give them an Interest Sheet to fill out so you can have a record of their name and contact information). Raffles can be a great way to collect contact information at events. To enter the contest, each young man who attends a Social Outreach Event should be encouraged to provide his name, personal e-mail address, social networking e-mail addresses he uses, such as on MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter address, cell phone number, and possibly a home address. Raffle prizes can range from lunches at local restaurants to movie tickets to gift certificates redeemable through iTunes. Prizes don’t have to be expensive and can often be donated. Guest books are another way to collect contact information. Participants can be directed to the guest book when they arrive or at any other point throughout the event. More information on recruitment to M-groups can be found in Module 9: M-groups.

More passive ways of collecting names don’t work nearly as well. We have found that simply setting up a table at an outreach event and asking men to provide their names and contact information does not yield many new names. In fact, many men may intentionally avoid such tables which is why more creative and active approaches to collecting names are required. Likewise, simply posting a sign-up sheet also does not work well. (See Module 9: M-groups for more ideas about recruiting men to M-groups).

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**Interest Sheet**

Please check those areas of AMP that interest you:

- Outreach/Safer Sex Promotion
- distributing materials at bars and around town
- developing safer sex promotional strategies
- participating in safer sex promotion at public venues

- Marketing/Public Relations
- designing marketing materials for AMP, including websites and profiles (Facebook, Myspace, Twitter)

- Small Event Planning
- Large Event Planning
- Public Forum Planning
- Administrative
- AMP House Maintenance
- Sign up for UnPlugged Session

Other ideas for involvement, talents you’d like to share or ideas for new projects you’d like to suggest? Please use the back to explain....
Greeting newcomers at Social Outreach Events

**Hospitality counts** At each event, Coordinators and Core Group members should be on the lookout for young men who are new to the Project. Often men who are attending a Project event for the first time are shy and uncertain how to meet others. Each new young man should be approached personally by a Coordinator, Core Group member, or volunteer. Welcome him to the event, explain more about the Project, introduce him to others, and eventually encourage him to get involved. At M-Project in Wilton Manors, FL (near Fort Lauderdale), the Coordinator made sure that each new person who walked through the door was made to feel personally welcome. The Coordinator understood how hard it might be for guys to walk into a space where they didn’t know anyone, and how important it was to set a standard of friendliness for everyone else to follow. Similarly, in MPower in Albuquerque, a team of men served as “greeters” at each medium- and larger-sized event. Their responsibility was to meet all newcomers, show them around the Project space, and introduce them to young men already involved with the Project.

**Breaking the ice** Making initial contact with a stranger can be a difficult experience for some volunteers, and even sometimes for Coordinators. There are some strategies, however, that will make it easier to do. For example, think ahead of time about what to say to someone new. How will you introduce yourself? What words will you use to describe the Project in the most appealing way possible?

Many Projects come up with a simple way of describing what they’re about that works really well when Project volunteers greet someone new. The Mu Crew in Dayton, Ohio describes their Project this way: “The Mu Crew is like a fraternity for gay/bi guys ages 18-29ish. We encourage making new friends, relaxing, continuing our own education about life, doing new things, and keeping a mindset that everyone’s cool as they are.” In Austin, the men describe the Project this way: “We are a group of young gay, bi, and curious guys working together to build a stronger, more supportive community here in Austin.”

Remember, when meeting someone new it is as important to listen as to talk. Finding out important details about a potential volunteer can help you match each individual’s talents, skills, and interests to the needs of the Project. For example, if you find out that someone is an art student or particularly skilled at graphics, you can invite him to work on developing outreach materials.

Sometimes newcomers to the Project will arrive together. In this situation, you may need to approach a group of young men rather than an individual. One strategy we have found helpful here is for two or more volunteers (or a Coordinator and a couple of volunteers) to greet a group of newcomers together. This way you can support each other as you initiate conversation.
If a newcomer shows up for an event with someone who is already involved in the Mpowerment Project, you may want to make sure that the Mpowerment Project participant has explained the Project to his friend and invited him to attend an M-group. You’ll still want to get the newcomer’s name, phone number, and e-mail address so that you can keep him informed about the Project and recruit him to a future M-group (if he is not yet ready to sign up for one). You might also take the opportunity to ask him what questions he has about the Project.

**Responding to very personal HIV/AIDS questions at Outreach Events**

Sometimes young gay/bisexual men may approach a Coordinator or Core Group member with very personal questions or concerns about safer sex or HIV/AIDS at an outreach event. This is a good sign that your Project has created a safe space where it is natural to discuss such topics. However, having these types of conversations at an outreach event may be difficult given their rather social atmosphere. Finding a quieter place to have a one-on-one conversation is probably a good idea. At the end of the conversation, encourage him to attend an M-group and get his contact information.

**Publicity for Social Outreach Events**

There are numerous ways to publicize Social Outreach Events. As with all Project activities, it is important that publicity reach as many young gay/bisexual men in the community as possible without attracting the attention of potentially non-supportive individuals. For this reason, we have avoided advertising outreach events in the mainstream media. Instead, to publicize events we have relied on flyers in gay or gay-friendly venues (bars, cafes, and campus organizations); advertisements, announcements, and calendar listings in local gay and alternative newspapers; word-of-mouth communications by men who are involved with the Project; and postings on voicemail, web pages, and electronic bulletin boards. We briefly cover publicity here, but it is covered in more depth in Module 10: Publicity.

**Bar theatrics**

For large- or mid-sized events, it is helpful for the Outreach Team to advertise the event at community venues 1-2 weeks before the event. This is accomplished by giving an engaging event-promotion performance and distributing invitations during visits to bars, community events, coffeehouses, and other appropriate locations. For example, the Spectrum Project in Tallahassee, FL decided to use a mailman theme to promote one of their first events. The Outreach Team dressed up in simple costumes with bags slung across their shoulders, brimmed hats, and a simple patch on the chest with an image of a rooster. On the invites for the event, the safer sex tagline read, “We want to ensure that your ‘package’ gets delivered safely.”
For MPower’s “We are Family” Picnic in Albuquerque, an Outreach Team of 12 volunteers visited each gay bar in Albuquerque wearing specially made “We are Family” t-shirts. They asked the DJ to announce the picnic and play the “We are Family” theme song, during which they danced as a group and later passed out invitations throughout the bar, along with safer sex promotional materials. This relatively simple performance generated a lot of attention and interest among the bar patrons.

We have found that dressing in costume while promoting an event generally attracts more attention and is more effective than just wearing plain Project t-shirts. In addition, it is usually more fun for the Outreach Team to wear costumes than to dress in either t-shirts or in their regular clothes. Mpowerment Detroit’s Core Group, Young Brothers United (YBU for short), regularly organizes outreach event promotional activities with themes that call attention to their group and their Social Outreach Events. These are often very simple themes that are easy to pull off but have great visual impact, such as everyone dressing from head to toe in black, or white, or pink and white, or everyone wearing a tie-dyed tank top. Sometimes the men all wear a simple Mardi Gras mask or a red tie. One year, MPower’s Outreach Team in Albuquerque advertised one of their large events by dressing as sexy bumblebees and handing out honeycomb-shaped invitations that said, “Come to Where the Honeys Are.” The Austin Men’s Project promoted their Military Ball by having Outreach Team volunteers dressed in an array of bedazzling Army/Navy surplus costumes. They passed out invitations in bars and coffee shops before the event. To promote their Haunted House event (described earlier), the Outreach Team dressed as vampires and went out in a group to the bars and clubs to pass out invitations. All the costume required was a pair of pasted-on vampire fangs, a tube of light make-up, and black clothing.

The timing of outreach performances is also important to consider. When scheduling publicity activities, it is important to hold them far enough in advance of the event so that people will be able to attend. Then you can return briefly to the various venues a day or two before the event as a reminder. In Austin, the Outreach Team always tried to conduct their event promotion at the bars as they were filling up, but not so late that the patrons would be too intoxicated or distracted. The fun, upbeat, positive energy that the Outreach Team expresses attracts interest, intrigue, and good will throughout the community.

**Addressing resistance to bar theatrics**

It’s not unusual to experience initial resistance from some Project Coordinators who are unwilling to conduct themed outreach. However, time after time we’ve heard that once Coordinators got over the hurdle of performing themed outreach, that became one of the most anticipated, team-building aspects of the Project.
It is important that Project Supervisors are upfront with Coordinators about the expectation that they lead themed outreach events. Agencies need to hire someone who is well-suited to the Outreach Coordinator position. It requires someone with an outgoing, enthusiastic personality who is able to mobilize a diverse group of young men.

**Hints and tips for successful themed outreach**

**Foster a positive attitude.** Fostering a positive, can-do attitude is paramount. One phrase we’ve encouraged Coordinators to use is “fake it until you make it.” In other words, although this may not be your ideal way of doing outreach at the beginning, pretend that it is. You’ll be amazed at how much a negative attitude can stop the fun and creativity of this type of outreach. This form of outreach is a great way to meet other guys and invite them to the Project. Before going out, have Team members practice approaching each other. Have them invent cute opening lines that fit with the themed outreach.

**Make it short and engaging.** We don’t expect young men to be in themed costumes all night. We call these “Bar Zaps” for a reason. In Austin, the Project was able to cover two or three different bars in one night. They would spend 20-30 minutes in each location. Create a buzz and then leave. End the outreach by having guys change out of their costumes, so they can resume whatever they would normally be doing for the rest of the evening.

**Bring extra costumes with you.** In Albuquerque, Coordinators found that many young men who would normally do themed outreach may not be able to make it to Outreach Team meetings. It wasn’t unusual for the Outreach Team to arrive at a bar and have former outreach volunteers run up and want to help out, especially when the outreach theme was something sexy and fun. So, for instance, if the outreach theme is about sexy pirates, have some extra pirate hats and other props handy to give to volunteers who want to be sexy pirates at the last minute. This is an easy way to double the size of your Outreach Team on the spot.

**Don’t give up.** Have fun with this form of outreach. Remind yourself that the best form of recruitment is done in person in a friendly and positive manner. It will take time for an Outreach Team to learn how to support each other. Every themed outreach has lessons to be learned and improved upon.

**Send out e-mail, publicity, and reminders.** Sending out advance publicity about upcoming Social Outreach Events is very helpful if you have a listserv of men who have provided the Project with their contact information. E-mail is another effective advertising approach that has been used for Project events in Albuquerque and Austin. *(Figure 7.3 in the Appendix to this module for several sample email reminders.)* Each Project maintains a list of email addresses for all men who have attended a Project-sponsored event. The power of social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace are a definite boon to getting the word out about the Project and any upcoming
events. However, we do not recommend you rely solely on any of the above modes of communication. Simply receiving an e-mail or seeing a posting on a website doesn’t have the same impact as a personal, face-to-face invitation. Outreach in popular places where young gay/bisexual men tend to congregate is still very much needed in order to effectively market the Mpowerment Project. Before large Social Outreach Events, the Project needs to have a presence at local bars to increase the chance that people hear about the activity. Some bars also cater to different groups of men on certain nights, such as African American or Latino men. If you are trying to target these populations in particular, be sure to show up the nights when they are at the bar.

**Develop a calendar of events.** Developing calendars of events—and posting these at the Project space, including them in outreach publicity, and posting them on-line—helps to remind men of upcoming Social Outreach Events. *(See Figure 7.2 in the Appendix to this module for examples of monthly calendars that illustrate the variety of events which are possible.)* With so many Projects now using MySpace and Facebook, calendars are often being replaced by blog postings about upcoming events. However, a nice calendar, like the ones produced by the Guateke Project in San Juan, PR and the re:Vision Project in New Orleans, LA. are still useful resources. Such Project calendars quickly convey that a lot is happening in a given month, while promoting safer sex at the same time though attractive graphics. The Guateke Project in San Juan, PR posts these calendars on their MySpace page, where they automatically become archived.

**Use book and magazine flyers.** A creative approach to reach new men who have not yet attended a Project-sponsored event is to put fliers announcing upcoming events into gay-themed books and magazines at bookstores and libraries. This is an especially effective technique in communities that do not have many or any publicity outlets that cater to the gay community, such as gay bars and newspapers. *(A more detailed discussion about how to go about doing this, and general recommendations for publicizing the Project and its activities can be found in Module 10: Publicity.)*
Evaluating Social Outreach Events

**Learn from your experience**

It is important to evaluate every Social Outreach Event, whether formally through the use of evaluation measures, or informally by observing who attended and how the event went. Each outreach event can be viewed as a learning process for both the Coordinators and the Core Group. At the next Core Group meeting following each Social Outreach Event, set aside time to share and process thoughts and feelings about the event. Congratulate each other on what went well, discuss what you learned, and decide how to improve future events. Here are a couple of key questions to ask:

- **Was publicity for the event effective?** (Did it reach enough men? Did it reach men who had never before attended any events? Did you reach all segments that you wanted to of the young gay/bisexual men’s community?)

- **Was the outreach performance carried out well?** (Did it keep the attention of the young men present? Was it interesting or funny? Did it effectively convey a message supportive of safer sex?)

- **Which segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community did and did not attend the event?** (Did it attract the segments that you intended to reach? If not, how could you reach them in the future?)

- **Did the event foster community-building?** (Did the event create a welcoming atmosphere? Was it favorable to meeting new men?)

While Projects often put on Social Outreach Events that are wonderfully successful, all Projects have also put on some events that can hardly be classified as highly successful, although in fairness they may not have been failures either. Regardless of the outcome, keep a sense of humor about you and don’t get discouraged. Remember—even if an event does not live up to expectations, it may still have reached a number of men. New men may have been recruited to the Project or to M-groups, and may have formed new, supportive friendships. Regardless of how successful a Social Outreach Event may be, learn from what may not have worked so well and use that insight in future planning. Consider what went right and what was less successful, and learn from the experiences—and then move on. It is also important to find ways to support Team members when they experience disappointment. However, we have found that it is not helpful to dwell too long on failures, point fingers, or spend inordinate amounts of time complaining about a non-responsive community. In short, for all of the above reasons, it is critically important that the Coordinators and the Core Group evaluate together every medium and large outreach event (as well as occasionally evaluate the effectiveness of a Project’s smaller, ongoing events).

**Record each event**

The Mpowerment Project Social Outreach Event Evaluation Form will be useful in guiding the Core Group discussion about each event (See Module 12: Evaluation, Figure 12.8 for the Social Outreach Event Evaluation Form.). Following the discussion, we suggest that the Project Coordinator complete a written copy of the form to serve as
a record of the Project’s activities. In addition, with the form keep copies of all materials used for the event, including flyers, posters, ads, camera-ready art, photos, and so forth. Many Projects have found that making a scrapbook of all this material serves as an exciting and comprehensive visual history for new Project participants, implementing agency staff, funders, and future Coordinators. Many Projects also use their MySpace and Facebook profiles to upload photos of recent events, in effect maintaining an on-line scrapbook.

Keeping complete records is important in providing documentation of Project activities. It also prevents the duplication of efforts in case an event is repeated or any of the materials are needed for future events. In addition, records help Project volunteers learn from the experiences of past participants. For more information on Project evaluation, see Module 12: Evaluation.

The Outreach Team

In addition to Social Outreach Events, the other type of Formal Outreach in the Mpowerment Project is outreach performances. These involve Teams of young gay/bisexual men going to gay venues in the community—typically bars and gay community events—to promote safer sex or to publicize the Project and advertise upcoming events. In addition, the Team conducts performances and outreach at Project-sponsored events.

The Outreach Team is responsible for designing outreach performances, making costumes, rehearsing skits, and conducting the actual performances. An Outreach Team needs to be convened at the start of the Project, and maintained over time (See Module 5: Core Group for information about working with volunteers). It is the Outreach Coordinator’s responsibility to assemble the Outreach Team—which typically consists of between 10 to 15 volunteers—and to work with them. The Team should meet regularly to
brainstorm and refine their ideas. It is important for them to keep the Core Group informed of what they are doing and to present “dress rehearsals” to the Core Group for their review and input. Many Core Group members also join the Outreach Team since it is the most visibly active group of Mpowerment Project volunteers.

**Here are some tips for working with an Outreach Team**

**Know your people** In order to create a successful Outreach Team, the outreach Coordinator should take the initiative to seek out young men who would be good on the Team and invite them to join. The Outreach Team is an excellent place for men who are outgoing, not afraid of approaching new people, and have an interest or background in theater or performing. Some Team members will be willing to engage in performances only if they can remain anonymous, which is easily accomplished by using masks and costumes. Frequently just by wearing a costume, men who are shy will feel more comfortable taking on an outgoing role. Some may not yet be ready to participate in performances, but over time may gain enough self-confidence to take part. We have also found that volunteers who are uncomfortable performing in public can still be valuable additions to the Outreach Team. They can help make costumes, plan the skits, and design and assemble outreach materials. It is important to make all volunteers feel their contributions are valued, regardless of whether they participate in performances or not.

Since some volunteers—especially those who are less outgoing—may feel some anxiety before a performance, it is important for the Team to rehearse what they will say and do and to build morale among Team members before walking into the various venues. If several nights of bar outreach are planned within a short period of time, it is important to recruit different “casts” of volunteers to avoid burnout.

**It’s a team effort** To effectively assemble and maintain the Outreach Team, the Outreach Coordinator must be sensitive to the motivations and desires of the Team members. Working together as an Outreach Team is a very empowering experience for the volunteers when they are involved in all decisions, and feel that they are listened to and that their ideas are taken seriously. When it appears the Team may require guidance in selecting outreach approaches, the Outreach Coordinator should ask questions that get members to look at ideas critically and use their creativity to improve them. Presenting the Team’s ideas, as they evolve, to the Core Group is a valuable way to get additional feedback.

If the Coordinator still doubts that the best decisions are being made, he can suggest that the Team test their ideas by asking some friends what they think of them. Often waiting just a week can make a big difference. This gives Team members more time to reflect on the ideas they already have and on their friends’ opinions. The next time they meet they can share what they learned and use the ideas to improve the performance.
Have fun! The work that the Outreach Team does together should be enjoyable. (As a reminder, one of the Project’s Guiding Principles is that activities should have a social focus and be fun.) If the work becomes drudgery, volunteers will not want to participate. Each time the group meets, we recommend providing light refreshments (beverages and munchies).

Planning and producing Outreach Team performances

Outreach Team performances should be entertaining, fun, and contribute to the spirit of whatever is already occurring in the setting. For example, during an open mic/poetry/performance event sponsored by the Alpha Project in Philadelphia, the Outreach Team developed a choreographed dance based on the song “Cell Block Tango” from the musical Chicago. Safer sex messaging, in the form of props, script, and movement were woven into the performance. Similarly, the materials that are distributed by the Outreach Team should be eye-catching, positive, and varied, as described earlier, and should contain messages that go beyond simple “do’s” and “don’ts” of sexual conduct so that men read them and share them with friends.

Bar zaps intentionally create a scene in order to attract attention and distribute safer sex materials.

Classic outreach: The Bar Zap The “classic” approach to outreach performances is the bar zap. Here, a Team of about 10 costumed men enters the bar together as a group. They intentionally create a scene that attracts the attention of bar patrons, mingle with them, distribute safer sex promotional materials, and then leave. We call it a zap because the visit is unexpected and dramatic—it immediately gets people’s attention and ends almost as quickly as it begins.

Projects have held all types of zaps. For example, TANK in Harrisburg, PA used a cowboy theme to conduct a bar blitz. Team members handed out temporary tattoos of the Project logo and all wore tight jeans, boots, and cowboy hats to hand out materials and condoms. Adam and Steve in Anchorage conducted an outreach where the men all dressed up as camp counselors and boy scouts. At Pride Alive in Minneapolis, the Outreach Team conducted a bar zap around Valentines Day that had a cupid theme. One cupid was scantily clad, and bar patrons were encouraged to have their picture taken with him as he handed them Project materials and condoms. And at Exodus Mpowerment in Memphis, TN, the Project made arrangements with a local bar so that volunteers could come in, hang a piñata, and then patrons took turns attempting to break it open. Inside, of course, was information about Exodus Mpowerment, and condoms and lube.

In MPower in Albuquerque, Condomaniacs wore costumes representing the kinds of condoms they were distributing. For example, the young men distributing Sheik condoms dressed as sheiks, the men who distributed Rough Rider condoms wore leather, and the young man who distributed Kiss of Mint condoms dressed as a forest nymph. The Outreach Team sometimes went onto the stage that was usually reserved
for go-go dancers and danced together as a group in costumes. For another outreach performance, the Team wore MPower sport muscle tees and dressed as lifeguards. As a take-off on the former TV show “Baywatch,” they handed out creative “Gaywatch” safer sex materials. They attracted attention by blowing their lifeguard whistles, carrying beach balls, and dancing together on the bar’s stage. In anticipation of the 2000 millennium, the Austin Outreach Team staged a “Y2Gay” (a take off on the phrase “Y2K” for the year 2000) bar zap in which they dressed up in futuristic costumes and silver makeup. They heralded the “future of safe sex,” distributing CD cases filled with safer sex ideas including condoms, lube, and Project promotional materials.

**Customize your cleverness**

Outreach Team performances and bar zaps can be customized for various holidays, seasons, and events. For example, at re:Vision in New Orleans, the Outreach Team dressed up as doctors and nurses for their outreach just before Halloween. “Doctor’s recommendations” were to have fun, use condoms and lube, come visit the Project, meet guys, and build a community. At the Genesis Project in Pocatello, ID, Team members created a summer theme for an outreach performance that took place just before Memorial Day. They wore Hawaiian costumes and handed out safer sex packs with individual packets of pineapple coconut Crystal Light. The Outreach Team in Albuquerque visited that city’s bars in August, shortly after the local university was back in session, and used a “Back to School” theme. Team members wore costumes to represent different types of students including a football jock, a PE coach, a nerd, a homecoming queen (in drag, of course!), a graduate in cap and gown, and a safer sex cheerleader. The safer sex promotional material they distributed looked like a student’s notebook with the front cover containing “Back to School Basics”). It discussed “electives” such as drama, physical education, and art, and offered safer sex activities appropriate to the subject. For example, the recommendation for theater arts students was to “dress him up, role play, and then strip him down.”

On other occasions, the Outreach Team may present a theatrical performance using music, dance, and/or comedy to promote safer sex. This can range from the simple to the elaborate. The Project in Eugene planned a simple, but effective performance. Since the local gay bar held karaoke nights each week, their Outreach Team prepared a song that highlighted safer sex and performed it one evening. At the Haunted House event in Austin, black plastic was stretched between two trees in the back yard, and a rented smoke machine and strobe light were placed behind the plastic. The Outreach Team positioned themselves behind the plastic sheets, and turned on the smoke machine and strobe light. They began
chanting a rhyme adapted from the “Nightmare on Elm Street” movie series to promote safer sex in a humorous fashion, they then cut through the black plastic with knives and distributed safer sex promotional materials to men at the event.

**Gear your approach to the event's size**

**Large events**

For larger and sometimes medium-sized events like dance or house parties, we recommend preparing a “performance art piece.” These can take many forms. Eugene’s Club M (the name of several events) generally featured a stage show at the peak time of attendance at the event. For example, one evening at Club M, mysterious enshrouded figures emerged dancing amid the crowd on the dance floor. They slowly wound their way up onto the stage where they positioned themselves like statues with large bananas painted on the shrouds that covered them. The Master of Ceremonies then directed the crowd’s attention to the spotlight where the star performer appeared—Condom Miranda, a drag queen (and Core Group member) who was a cross between Carmen Miranda and Bette Midler. She performed a tropical stage show number dancing around the various banana figures on stage. One by one she pulled the shrouds off the figures, revealing seven Condom Men who were each dressed in costume to personify a brand of condom: Trojan (a Greek warrior), Ramses (a pharaoh), Kimono (a Geisha boy), Sheik (an Arab sheik), Gold Coin (a pirate), Kiss of Mint (a forest nymph), and Rough Rider (a leather man). As described earlier, they also conducted zaps at the bars in these costumes.

Next, Condom Miranda interviewed each Condom Man about the merits of his condom. The Master of Ceremonies then introduced the Mpowerment Project Coordinators who announced upcoming Project activities and invited audience members to become involved. Following these introductions, the Condom Men returned to the dance floor where they mingled with the crowd and handed out their brand of condoms. To distribute the condoms, each Condom Man had his own specially designed “cigarette tray.” For example, Trojan’s was a Trojan horse, Ramses’ a pyramid, Sheik’s a magic lamp, Gold Coin’s a treasure chest, and Kimono’s a pagoda. The trays and props were made by the Outreach Team using cardboard and papier-mâché. This performance, like all others, was completely designed and conducted by the Outreach Team members.

**Medium-sized events**

For medium-sized events such as house parties, one effective approach is for costumed Outreach Team members to dispense safer sex materials while mingling with the crowd. At Albuquerque’s Home for the Holidays Party, Team members who were dressed as elves and toy soldiers mixed with partygoers while distributing packets containing safer sex promotional materials, condoms, and candy canes. A Santa—who was sometimes dressed up to look “nice” and at other times “naughty”—had young men sit on his lap and discuss who they wanted for Christmas. Santa would then give them a safer sex suggestion to try that was both “naughty and nice.”
Check out what others are doing

Clearly, Projects other than Mpowerment have had great success with the Outreach Team strategy. You may find their ideas useful as well. Borrowing our Condom Miranda idea, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation developed a Team of 12 Condom Mirandas who visited the bars dispensing condoms. They have also used a Team of Zorro-like characters known as “Rubermen” in black masks and capes who periodically zapped the bars. As an example of a more elaborate production, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation occasionally staged an erotic and comical theatrical revue called “Naked City Cocktails.” It featured comedy routines, and demonstrations of sex toys and other safer sex promotion in bars and adult cinemas.

Other communities have staged gay versions of game shows such as “The Dating Game” or “Singled Out” in which they were able to weave in safer sex messages. For example, the Boulder County AIDS Project sponsored games of “Family Feud.” First off, volunteers surveyed customers of the local gay bar, asking a variety of questions from favorite gay star to favorite lube or favorite HIV testing location. The next week, two teams played Family Feud and tried to guess how the bar patrons had answered the questions. Others have used contests or pageants to entertain the crowd and promote safer sex. All of these events can add a welcome variety and excitement to otherwise mundane nights at the bar and be fun and enjoyable for both bar patrons and the Outreach Team members.

Successful Outreach Performances

There are several key rules for staging a successful outreach performance, whether at a bar or at an outreach event.

Be engaging Whatever the Outreach Team does should be entertaining and appealing. Ideally, bar patrons will consider it a treat that you are there to add excitement to the bar that night. Theatrical touches like costumes, music, and special lighting are extremely helpful. We have found that when Outreach Team members are in costume and perform roles quite different from their regular personality, it is easier for them to approach bar patrons and event participants. Dramatic productions generally fail since they often bog down in dialogues that do not seem realistic or just seem silly. As a result, we suggest avoiding serious, dramatic performances. Also avoid fear-inducing messages. First of all, bar owners tend to be very leery of activities that they fear will create a “downer” in the bar. Second, research has shown that scare tactics are usually unsuccessful in changing people’s behavior.

Be brief Even the best performances are unlikely to hold the attention of bar patrons or men attending outreach events for more than a few minutes. Remember that they did not come to the bar or the outreach event to watch your performance, as entertaining as it may be.
Rehearse

Practice, practice, practice. A poorly prepared performance is embarrassing for everyone involved—the performers, the audience, and the Project. To assist Teams in planning performances, we have included a sample Outreach Team Planning Form (See Figure 7.4 in the Appendix to this module). Planning a performance should be approached in much the same way as planning an Social Outreach Event. This form addresses all the issues you need to consider and lists all the steps you should take. It also includes a timeline.

Once the performance is over, you will also want to evaluate it. The Mpowerment Project Outreach Team Evaluation Form will help you reflect on how effective it was and how it could be improved next time (See Figure 7.5 in the Appendix to this module for a sample Outreach Team Evaluation Form). It also serves as a record of Project activities.

Work cooperatively with local gay bars

It is critical—and not always easy—for the Outreach Team and the Project as a whole to maintain a congenial relationship with the gay bars in their community. The support of the bar owner or manager is necessary before the Team can perform in the bar. In many communities, obtaining the bar establishment’s cooperation has been very difficult for a number of reasons. Some bar owners argue that AIDS is too much of a “downer,” that Project events conflict with busy bar nights, or that they don’t want to ruin the atmosphere of the bar with HIV-prevention activities. Some complain that the materials and condoms given out to patrons end up creating a mess on the bar floor. Still others fear that warnings about the HIV risks of combining alcohol and sex hurt their business.

Advice for developing and maintaining cooperative relationships with key figures in the community is discussed in other sections of this manual (See Module 11: Community Advisory Board and Module 2: Community Assessment). In addition to working cooperatively with bar owners, you will benefit by cultivating a congenial relationship with doormen, bouncers, bar backs, bartenders, and club managers. These staff members often have the most direct control over what happens at the bar and can be invaluable allies.

These issues underscore the importance of the Outreach Team doing whatever it can to prevent these problems from arising. Producing performances that are entertaining can generate excitement at the bar and make being there more fun for patrons. Some activities such as a well-advertised “Dating Game” can increase bar attendance on an evening of the week that tends to be slow. When planning events, work closely with the bar staff to ensure that Team performances do not disrupt the bar’s business. After each performance, clean up any trash that has been generated by the performance inside the bar. Likewise, make sure that these materials are not left strewn on the sidewalk or street outside the bar. Some Projects have received angry calls from parents whose children found erotic safer sex promotional materials left on the sidewalk. It is very much in the best interests of the Project to avoid these sorts of problems.
Outreach Materials

As part of each Outreach Team performance, the Outreach Team distributes materials that promote safer sex and advertise the Project, along with condoms and lubes. Ideally, these materials will be stimulating and visually appealing so that the young men who receive them will be motivated to keep them. The materials can then serve as a reminder about safer sex, testing, and the Project.

The Mpowerment Project is not a condom promotion project; it does not simply implore young gay/bisexual men to use condoms. Instead, it encourages safer sex, which means that any sexual activities that reduce risk are encouraged. However, condoms and lubes are nearly always distributed as part of the materials, unless the materials are only about promoting an upcoming outreach event. Providing different types of condoms and lubes is important because then the men can try a different brand than they normally use, thereby determining if another type feels better. The same is true with lubes: it can be helpful to have an opportunity to try out different types.

Again, the goal in making these items available is to motivate men to use them as part of safer sex practices.

Size, shape, and content

There are many types of outreach materials that can be developed. As with other aspects of the Project, creativity is the key to producing successful outreach materials. The materials can take many different forms: a small card, a folded “matchbook,” a packet with condoms and lube, a ‘zine (small trendy looking magazine), a fotonovela (small booklet with cartoons, photographs, or illustrations that tell a story), a small toy or trinket with a message attached, and so forth.

Outreach materials should be small and light enough so they fit easily into a pocket. If the materials are too large or bulky, many young men will not keep
them, especially while they are socializing. This is particularly true when the materials are distributed at a bar or in a place where the young men would prefer not being seen carrying safer sex materials, and also probably don’t want to be carrying around anything at all. At Austin’s Lava Luau event, they circumvented this “rule” by distributing a colorful lei with detachable safer sex promotional materials. Men kept the lei because it could be worn around their necks.

Rather than simply urging men to be safe sexually or to get tested, the messages contained in the materials can address a wide variety of factors that have been shown through research to be linked to unsafe sex. (Examples include beliefs that safer sex is boring, boyfriend issues, assumptions about each others’ HIV status, a willingness to have unsafe sex if a guy is particularly attractive, and being high.) The messages about testing can also address underlying reasons for getting tested or avoiding it (Examples include the advantages to getting tested rather than worrying about one’s HIV status; the fact that testing can be obtained free of charge at many places). Outreach materials can address these factors with targeted messages that can be erotic, humorous, factual, motivational, or a combination of these tones and styles. We recommend that the messages contain a positive tone and offer ideas that support safer sex, rather than admonishing men to avoid unsafe sex. Sometimes it can also be effective to provide referrals to other organizations or programs that can help young gay/bisexual men to deal with some of these issues.

Serious messages are fine, but take care not to preach or present a message that arouses fear since such messages are unlikely to be effective with young gay/bisexual men. Fear-based messages can actually be harmful since they can cause some people to feel overwhelmed and therefore, less capable of practicing safer sex. In addition, the materials should go beyond simply providing guidelines about safe and unsafe sexual practices, since research indicates a majority of young gay/bisexual men already know this information. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge about what is safe and unsafe is not a major predictor of why young gay/bisexual men have unsafe sex. However, we do know many of the reasons why young men have unsafe sex, and these are listed below.

Clearly, it is not feasible or appropriate to address all of these factors in one outreach piece. Rather, we recommend that Projects develop a wide range of materials that address a variety of factors. For example, the outreach materials for a rave-themed dance party could address the link between substance use and unsafe sex; the materials for a forum on relationships could include tips on how to talk about safer sex within the context of a love relationship; or the theme of outreach materials for a fashion show could relate to self-esteem and body image.
The following list includes factors that may be helpful to address in materials. They either contribute to unprotected sex among young gay/bisexual men, or are factors that contribute to being safer sexually, and are some of the issues that your Project may want to address in its outreach materials.

- eroticization and enjoyment of safer sex
- alcohol and recreational drug use, and using them when having sex
- perceived risk of getting infected with HIV
- risks of contracting STDs and how this might increase risk for transmitting and contracting HIV
- risk of transmitting HIV to others
- depression, loneliness
- condom availability (including planning ahead to have them)
- treatment optimism (the belief that current treatments for HIV infection minimize the severity of contracting HIV/AIDS)
- ineffective sexual communication/negotiation skills (verbal and nonverbal)
- establishing a norm about safer sex and knowing your current HIV serostatus in the community
- encouraging friends to have safer sex (encouraging Informal Outreach)
- self-esteem
- negotiating or renegotiating safer sex with a boyfriend (including trust and intimacy issues)

Visually eye-catching and trendy materials seem to be most effective with young gay/bisexual men. Images of attractive young men go over well, but make sure that the images reflect the diverse ideas of what young men in your community view as being attractive. Depending on the setting where materials are distributed, sexually explicit words and images can be quite effective. Other images that have been well received in various communities include comics, photos, movie stills, pictures of food, and abstract graphics.

In addition to the safer sex message, all outreach materials should include something that ties them to the Mpowerment Project. At the minimum, the Project logo and phone number should be on everything that is distributed. A short description of what the Project is about may also be helpful. For example, Atlanta’s Da CRIBB is really an acronym for “Creating Rich Intelligent Black Bruthas.” Similarly, Fusion in Wilton Manors, FL uses the tagline “creado para chicos,” which helps the Latino/Hispanic men that it targets understand that it’s a group just for them. Several Projects have added the tagline “By young men, for young men” to all their materials. Similarly, MPower in Albuquerque used the tagline, “Young gay/bisexual men working together to build our community.” MPower OC in Orange
County, CA uses the slogan “Orange County’s hottest social group for young gay/bi guys!” Outreach materials can also be distributed to coincide with publicity for an upcoming Project event such as a dance or picnic, in which case the material can also include information about the event.

To increase the likelihood that young men will open and read the safer sex materials, use gimmicks and include non-HIV related information as well. For example, at Mpower OC in Orange County, they handed out military dog tags with “I care” written in both English and Spanish. At M4M in Monroe, LA, they hosted an event at a local bar with a winter solstice theme. They had a sexy “Solstice Santa” and set up a photo printer at the bar so that participants could take home a picture of them sitting on Solstice Santa’s lap. And at the Genesis Project in Pocatello, ID, the Outreach Team went around with Easter baskets and passed out plastic Easter eggs filled with condoms, lube and candy. The outreach material distributed at Albuquerque’s “Home for the Holidays” included candy canes. Santa Barbara put on an event called “Silver Scream” near the end of October, which combined the themes of Hollywood movies and Halloween. Their outreach materials were distributed in small bags used to hold popcorn at movie theaters. Albuquerque volunteers handed out a safer sex brochure at a Mardi Gras party that included a recipe for beignets, and another safer sex packet contained tips for flirting. In Austin’s Haunted House event, the safer sex promotional material included a piece of candy wrapped in a piece of white cloth which was then tied off and decorated to look like a little scary ghost. A printed card was tied to the neck of the ghost, and the whole package was finished off with a little plastic ghost, bat, or spider ring clipped around the ghost’s neck. The printed material included the chant the Outreach Team performed, along with an invitation to the M-groups, and ideas about how to eroticize safer sex presented in an amusing way.

Who does what?  The Outreach Team and Core Group volunteers are responsible for designing and producing the outreach materials. Usually there are Core Group members who are talented in graphic arts or computers and enjoy using their artistic skills to create the materials. If you do not already have men in your Core Group with these talents, you might make a concerted effort to locate some who do and encourage them to join.
Computers and desktop publishing now make it possible to produce high quality materials provided you have the appropriate software and hardware. Access to a scanner and the Internet can open up a vast world of images that can be used in your materials. Some local copy centers also offer nonprofit organizations discounts or free access to their equipment. There are also some safer sex materials on our website (www.mpowerment.org) which you are welcome to take ideas from or to download.

We have found that there is no need to use glossy paper or multiple ink colors on outreach materials, both of which are expensive. However, some Projects have had tremendous success in keeping costs down and still producing colorful materials by creating small-size full-color materials and distributing them selectively, while distributing black-and-white materials more widely. For example, the Austin Men’s Project often printed small invitations that fit four to a page. The original was printed in color, and then the Coordinators made approximately 25 color copies of the original. This resulted in 100 full-color invitations that were only selectively distributed. The rest of the invitations were copied in black-and-white onto colored paper. These invitations were distributed much more widely throughout the entire community.

The Outreach Coordinator is responsible for working closely with the volunteers during the materials design process to discuss ideas and review drafts. Drafts of all materials should also be presented to the Core Group for feedback and approval before the final version is produced. Project volunteers can assemble the materials as a group while they are hanging out in the Project space, thereby turning the work into a fun, social time.

**Keep your materials fresh** Keep changing your outreach materials. Seasonal materials for occasions such as Halloween, Mardi Gras, Valentine’s Day, Independence Day, Cinco de Mayo, or New Year’s can add variety. Creating a series of materials can also be quite effective. For example, Eugene’s Project created a series of cards, each containing a description of a different erotic safer sex activity. San Francisco’s Rubbermen gave out cards with their individual pictures and brief role model testimonials about safer sex. When you create only one version of a card or of other materials, this limits the amount of dialogue a volunteer can have with others. Having multiple versions gives volunteers new opportunities to engage other young men in conversations about safer sex topics. (“Did you see the newest version of the series about _______?”) Sometimes it is easier to generate new ideas by expanding on an existing series of materials rather than trying to develop something entirely new. In addition, men may be motivated to collect the whole series of materials. Examples of posters that are part of a series which promotes HIV testing can be found on our website; these were developed by the RecBoyz in Detroit.
Consider developing themes

Different materials can be developed that connect to the theme of an upcoming Project event, use promotional activities for the event, or are given out as a party favor at the event. For example, at Eugene’s “Industrial Evolution” dance party, the Outreach Team distributed materials that looked like screwdrivers and included a condom, lube, and information about the Project. These “tools for Mpowerment” went along with the industrial theme of the party and were handed out by guys in construction worker outfits decorated with the Mpowerment Project logo. Likewise, distributing eggs at spring events is in keeping with the Easter season, as is distributing candy canes in December along with safer sex behaviors as “nice” (vs. naughty) keeps the holiday theme.

Review of materials

Many materials may need to be reviewed by two separate entities: the Core Group, and a state or local Program Review Panel, if your Project receives Centers for Disease Control (CDC) funding. Therefore, planning ahead is crucial to ensure that there is enough time to involve the Core Group in the design and production of the materials and to ensure your compliance with federal requirements pertaining to the content of AIDS-related materials. These reviews can be time-consuming, so plan accordingly.

Any Project that is funded by the CDC must go through a review of written materials, pictorials, audiovisuals, questionnaires, survey instruments, and educational sessions. Different communities have different timelines and standards for their review process. While the materials review process has been challenging in many communities, others have found ways to work within these constraints and still produce exciting materials within an adequate amount of time. Although it is important not to spend extensive time and resources on materials that you are sure will never make it through the review process, we also believe that “pushing the envelope” can be a good thing as far as materials development goes. Review committees do have a good deal of latitude concerning what content they will approve or reject. Some communities have reported that their materials are rarely, if ever, rejected—in part, because they are carefully designed with the HIV prevention needs of their community in mind. It may also be important to meet with the Program Review Panel to express to them why it is important to develop particular kinds of materials. We have heard that such panels often appreciate understanding why eye-catching materials are used by the Project.
Create interactive outreach activities at Social Outreach Events

At medium or larger Social Outreach Events, we also suggest having interactive outreach activities, in addition to Outreach Team performances and distributing safer sex promotional materials. When people have to actively think about an issue, they learn more than if they are only passive recipients of information. Watching Outreach Team performances and receiving outreach materials are passive in nature. Therefore, we suggest trying to devise activities that are fun and engaging, but require the participants to think creatively about safer sex.

For example, both in Albuquerque and in Austin, the Projects’ Christmas holiday parties included interactive components. As guests showed up for the festivities, each received a cutout paper snowflake and was asked to write a hot, safer sex activity on the paper and hang it on the Christmas tree. The safer sex snowflakes became a playful topic of discussion during the party, as well as for the next several weeks at the Project space. In Albuquerque’s Mardi Gras party, participants had to engage in a few different activities in order to earn bead necklaces. These included writing their favorite safer sex activity on a festive board in the Project space and introducing themselves to someone new at the Project. At an Albuquerque event “Groove is in the Park,” there was a scavenger hunt to locate erotic items hidden in the park (blindfolds, rope, condoms, dildos, handkerchiefs, dental dams, handcuffs, candles...etc). After finding assorted items, the scavenger teams then described the most erotic safer sex things they might do with each item. The team with the most erotic answers won a prize. Austin hosted a Gay Games which included Olympic-style competitive events such as Tug of Love (tug of war), a water condom balloon toss, and relay races. One race had participants run to the end of a line, put on a blindfold, then place a condom and lube on a dildo.

In Mpowerment Detroit, there is a wall in the bathroom that they named “The Confessional.” The wall was painted in a jigsaw pattern and guys were encouraged to write whatever they wanted to inside each “puzzle” shape. Because it was located in a private space and each message was anonymous, guys felt comfortable writing very personal feelings on the wall. Over time,
the entire wall slowly filled up and became a source for discussion topics at Project related forums. Some comments on the wall included the following:

“Are you really free from the stigma of society?”

“I hate being alone, I am my own worst enemy.”

“I love how a man’s body feels against mine.”

“I wish everyone would stop being afraid and get tested. Knowledge is power.”

“I might be HIV positive. Help!”

“I wish that people could see how much of a beautiful person I could be, both inside and out. I know I can seem like a real bitch sometimes, but I know that inside of me, I have a really good heart and that I am a wonderful person to be around.”

The Austin Men’s Project also initiated a series of smaller outreach events in the community held at various coffee shops. The host of these events, assisted by Core Group volunteers and the Coordinators, would introduce men to one another and help get a conversation going. Core Group members who attended the event decided that their role could be to draw out men’s feelings on the subject of safer sex, couched in references to the Project’s goals and mission. Instead of being bombarded by questions about what they think of safe sex practices, they encounter a warm social group of men who want to build a stronger and supportive community and know that HIV prevention is a major part of that goal.
### Sample Timeline for Social Outreach Event Planning

**Time Line for outreach planning:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date to be done by</th>
<th>Check when completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discuss general ideas for event with Core Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form committees to work on each aspect of event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of each committees initial plans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Core Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design publicity materials and approaches for event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of publicity materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Core Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of ideas for safer sex promotion at event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Core Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of ideas for food/entertainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorations/costumes/props made</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party favors/safe sex promotional materials assembled</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehearsal for entertainment/safer sex promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set-up for event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean-up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Figure 7.2
Sample Calendar of Events

Appendix
Module 7: Formal Outreach
Hi-ya folks...

the month of June is right around the corner, and with it comes a couple of really great opportunities to volunteer within the community...

On June 7th we will volunteer at Texas Swing, a great big event that benefits Project Transitions, and on the 27th we’re helping the folks at Viva Las Vegas, a casino night that benefits AIDS Services of Austin. To let us know that you’re interested in either event, just send a message to

info@austinmensproject.com.

...and here’s what’s happening this week @ AMP:

Tonight (5/21) we will have our weekly Core Group meeting at 7. Come meet a few boys, and take part in the decision-making process here at AMP. Everyone is welcome. 7pm @ the AMPhouse

Thursday (5/23) Join us for Coffee Night, at the Sacred Cup. This is a very relaxed, very laid-back way night, where you can meet new faces, and chat in a really comfortable atmosphere. The Sacred Cup is located at the corner of Manor Rd and Chicon.

8pm Friday Night (5/24) we continue our boy movie month with “Lord of the Flies”. This is the classic tale of a group of boys getting stranded on an island, and letting their primal urges take over. Half nekkid, dirty, sweaty boys running around with spears and burning stuff.... hmmm
8pm @ the AMPhouse

Dates To Remember:

June 2nd - Texas Gay Pride Festival @ Fiesta Gardens
June 7th - Texas Swing
June 16th - Lava Luau IV @ the Metropolis
June 27th - Viva Las Vegas
Hello, hello, hello... its great to be young, queer and proud! As always lots to tell you about.

April 29, Wednesday @ 5pm - MANHUNT rehearsals -- an open invitation to anyone who wants to help get involved in this public forum is invited to come and help us out! It also gives you the inside skinny on just what we are going to present to the public! Meet at the MPower House.

April 30, Thursday @ 6:30pm - MPower presents MANHUNT - a cool public forum for young gay and bi guys on how to find your man in the urban jungle. At the House of Bands 480 Central SE, Next to the Hiland Theater... FREE and open to everybody... bring all your friends for this unforgettable event.

DO NOT MISS THIS. NO WAY, ITS MAY! May 1, Friday @ 7-10pm - TGIF - Sabrina the teenage witch and the movie of the night “Welcome to the Doll House.” I just asked Matt what the movie is about and he says, “If you have ever been an outcast, you will be touched by this film.” Hosted by Matt.

May 2, Saturday @ 2pm - Saturday OUTings. The word is that the Zoo might be invaded by MPower boys this weekend. Meet at MPower House @ 2pm, then leave by 2:30pm (the zoo might be around $5.00) Hosted by Dave.

May 2, Saturday (continued) @ 6pm - 8pm Poetry night. Come and share either your work, or your favorite poems or short stories. MPower is proud to host this wonderful event. We welcome all in the spirit of sharing and caring. Hosted by Nathan.

May 3, Sunday @ 2pm Volleyball - Play hard, get wet, and have a blast! Hosted by Daryl.

May 3, Sunday @ 3:30pm - Connections - Building Community, sharing dating and relationship tips, finding out what’s safe and what’s not. Invite your friends NOW. Sign up with John at 232-2990.

May 3, Sunday (continued) @ 7pm - Sci-Fi Sunday - Sci-fi movie of the week, OK, so Star Trek is in hiatus for a while, in it’s place we are now showing Sci-fi movies: this week: “Tank Girl”. Hosted by Nathan.

May 4, Monday @ 8pm - Coffee Talk - Come share free coffee and tea, and get in on the dish on what really goes on around here and the world. Hosted by Craig and Lorenzo.

May 5, Tuesday @ 7-9pm - Core Group - These guys run the program, reflect, and help us change our community for the better! Come and share your ideas on what the ideal community looks like. Give us ideas on what you would want to see MPower become and do. Every Tuesday at 7pm.

May 7, Thursday @ 7pm - Outreach Team meeting. Help us plan our next big OUTreach to the UNM campus, AMC, the Pulse and Double Rainbow. The best way to meet new guys and have your cover covered.’ Every Thursday at 7pm.

MPoWeR: GaY aNd Bi GUys 18-29 wORkiNg tOGetHer tO BuilD oUR coMmUnITy.

See you guys here,

Chris, Steven & John :-)}
Outreach Team Planning Form

Goals of this form

• To make sure that all aspects of the outreach are planned with enough advance notice so that changes can be made.

• To make sure that all aspects of the outreach are thought through carefully

Overview

What are the dates, times and location for the outreach? Be specific.
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What is the theme/approach for outreach? Describe in detail.
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

If it will be done at bars, do you have/need approval from bar managers/owners? List each bar and describe.
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What plans are being made to ensure communication and coordination among Mpowerment Project members in planning the outreach approach, materials development, and performance (if there is one)?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Distribution of Safer Sex Written Materials

What approach will be used? (i.e., a group together, doing a fast “zap”, engaging in conversation with bar patrons, etc.):
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Download this form as a Word document at www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure7-5.doc
Who will be on the Outreach Team?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Will costumes/props be used? If so, describe them and state who will make them?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Have all of the Outreach Team members attended an M-group before?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Performance
Will there be a performance? If so, describe it:

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Safer sex promotion within performance:
How will safer sex promotion be included in it?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What issues related to safer sex will be addressed?

____________________________________________________________________________

Who will design/plan the performance?

____________________________________________________________________________

Who will do the performance?

____________________________________________________________________________

Will costumes/props be used? If so, who will make them?

____________________________________________________________________________
Outreach Materials
Who will design the outreach materials?
____________________________________________________________________________

Describe safer sex materials:
____________________________________________________________________________

What issues related to safer sex will be addressed?
____________________________________________________________________________

Who is assembling the outreach materials?
____________________________________________________________________________

Will anything else be included in packets (e.g., invitations to M-groups, invitations to events, etc.)?
____________________________________________________________________________

Budget
What is the budget for the outreach? Describe in detail:
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
Outreach Team Evaluation Form
(to be completed after each outreach activity)

Location(s) where activity took place (be specific):
____________________________________________________________________________

Briefly describe activity:
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Number (and names) of Mpowerment volunteers who participated in distribution activities:
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Number (and names) of Mpowerment volunteers who participated in performance (if there was one):
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

How many people observed the outreach activity:
____________________________________________________________________________

What segments of men were reached? About how many men from each segment?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What safer sex promotional materials were distributed? How many?
____________________________________________________________________________

How many condoms were distributed: _____________________________________________

How many Lubes were distributed: _____________________________________________
Was anything else included in with materials? (e.g., invitations to M-groups, invitations to other events, etc.)

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Comments/feelings about this outreach activity:

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Download this form as a Word document at www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure7-6.doc
Informal Outreach

Objectives

To familiarize you with the concept of informal outreach, which involves talking with friends and acquaintances about the importance of safer sex and knowing your current HIV status. Informal outreach is taught and men are motivated to conduct informal outreach with their friends in the M-groups. Informal outreach is encouraged and reinforced throughout other Project activities.
Informal Outreach—men talking with and supporting each other about the need for safer sex and getting tested for HIV—is an integral part of creating a caring, supportive community of young gay/bisexual men.

The need to build a supportive, caring, and healthy community

A major goal of the Project is to build a community of young gay/bisexual men who care about and support each other, particularly around the issue of sexual risk-taking. Many young gay/bisexual men never talk openly about safe and unsafe sexual practices, nor do they show they care for one another by expressing support for practicing safer sex. One of the Guiding Principles of the Mpowerment Project is building a strong, and healthy community of young gay/bisexual men, which is accomplished in part via informal outreach.

The Mpowerment Project seeks to create a young gay/bisexual men’s community that includes three new social norms. First, we try to establish a norm or expectation that young gay/bisexual men will practice safer sex whenever they are in sexual situations. The assumption is that young gay/bisexual men will have safer sex whether they are the top or bottom partner, and regardless if they are HIV-positive or HIV-negative. Therefore, making assumptions about each other’s HIV status is not required. Second, we try to establish a norm that men will know their current HIV status by getting tested at least once a year, or more often if they have engaged in risky sex. The third norm we try to establish is that men talk with their friends about their sexual behavior and encourage them to have safer sex. This is part of what it means to be a member of a supportive and healthy community: you express support and caring of each other in many different ways, including talking about safer sex. We encourage men to support each other about dealing with families that are unsupportive or rejecting of them, how to walk down the street without being bashed, not driving while high, coping with homophobia, and in being safe sexually.
Since many young men may have fairly limited social networks of other young gay/bisexual men, an important goal of the Project is to foster the development of new friendships among men in this group. The intent is that these new friendships include a shared belief in the value of safer sex, and a commitment to support one another in practicing safer sex. Thus, the Mpowerment Project strives to build a stronger young gay/bisexual men’s community, while simultaneously influencing the norms of the community to be supportive of safer sex. Informal outreach is the strategy the Project uses to accomplish these goals. By helping young men expand their social networks, they will gain additional opportunities to spread the message of safer sex and the need to get tested regularly for HIV, as well as additional friends who are supporting them in having safer sex.

Marching to a different drummer
Most HIV prevention programs rely on trained health outreach workers to encourage men to be safer in their sexual activities. One of the ways that the Mpowerment Project differs from more traditional approaches to HIV prevention is its emphasis on mobilizing young gay/bisexual men to support each other in reducing high-risk sexual behaviors. As described in Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team, one way to accomplish this is through a number of formal outreach methods. The other major approach that the Project uses to encourage safer sex is through informal outreach.

Informal outreach occurs when young men communicate with each other about the need for safer sex. This type of outreach is called “informal” because it does not occur only during Project-sponsored activities. Rather, through its M-groups, the Project motivates and trains young men to talk—on
Informal outreach extends the messages about safer sex and testing throughout the community to men who do and do not attend the Project’s activities.

their own time, as well as at Project-sponsored events—with friends about the need to practice safer sex, and to seek HIV testing.

M-groups address the importance of encouraging one’s friends to practice safer sex by discussing approaches participants can use and giving them an opportunity to do some role-playing (see Module 9: M-groups). The Project also motivates young men to conduct informal outreach as a part of their being in a supportive, caring young gay/bisexual men’s community. It also provides them with safer sex promotional materials that they can give to their friends (see Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team).

A goal of the Mpowerment Project is to reach young gay/bisexual men in the community with multiple messages about safer sex and testing by using diverse approaches: written materials, verbal messages from friends, outreach performances, and Social Outreach events. Hence, informal outreach is the way that men reach out through their diverse social networks to reinforce messages about safer sex. These messages may be the most persuasive of all because they come from friends who care about other friends. Knowing that someone cares enough about you to talk about being safe sexually can be very compelling to young men, who may never have had anyone ever speak with them before about such an important issue.

Informal outreach and mobilizing men to speak with their friends also provides a way to reach men who never attend M-groups, don’t volunteer, and do not show up at Mpowerment Project Social Outreach events. The messages about safer sex and testing are taken beyond the doors of the Project space into the community. It is critical that Projects focus on the entire young gay/bisexual men’s community, and not just on those who come to the Project’s meeting space. This is a key strategy of the Mpowerment Project approach and relates to one of its Guiding Principles about the importance of diffusing messages about safer sex and getting tested for HIV. It is very important to diffuse these messages throughout diverse parts of the community.
There are a number of tried-and-true techniques that reinforce and support Project participants in continually promoting safer sex within their social networks. These are described below.

**Supporting Informal Outreach with Core Groups**

Periodically it is important for Core Group members to discuss and evaluate their success in talking about safer sex with friends. Projects around the country have reported that this is helpful in increasing informal outreach. After analyzing potential barriers to discussing safer sex with friends, the Coordinators should encourage Core Group members to talk to their friends in a way that would be comfortable for them. Then in a subsequent Core Group meeting, the Coordinator can ask the Core Group members to report back to the group about their experiences. In this way, problems or difficulties in talking about safer sex can be discussed, resolutions can be proposed, and the guys can be praised for their efforts.

**Supporting Informal Outreach through the use of the Project space**

Furniture in the Project space (e.g., comfortable chairs, sofas, etc.) can be arranged so it maximizes conversations between men. Safer sex promotional posters can be placed strategically, and condoms and lube should be available in bowls in every room. Not every conversation in the houses focuses on safer sex, but many do. Often Project participants, whether they are volunteers or Core Group members, will approach a Coordinator or a Core Group member and ask them about safer sex, or confide in them about issues they are having in being safe.

Posters can be developed and displayed in the Project space regarding the need to talk to friends about safer sex. As is discussed elsewhere, posters can be developed relatively easily on a computer and then printed at a copy store. Talking about safer sex and HIV/AIDS prevention does not occur spontaneously, so having visuals nearby can often stimulate conversations about the topic.
In order to encourage informal outreach, a number of Projects have adopted a “scoreboard” as a way to address the importance of young men encouraging each other to have safer sex. The scoreboard concept is quite simple. Essentially whenever a group member talks to a friend about safer sex, he simply adds a check on the board for each person he spoke with. The board can be posted in the Project space to serve as a visual representation of how much informal outreach has being conducted in the community so far, as well as a reminder to keep having these conversations.

Another way of encouraging informal outreach about safer sex and testing through the use of the Project space is with a question and answer format. You can either use a large sheet of paper on a wall, a dry erase board, or turn a wall into a chalkboard by using paint that becomes a chalkboard (Google “chalkboard paint”). On one of these you list provocative questions to which men provide responses. As men come into the space and see the questions and responses, they can provoke men to want to discuss what people have written, and begin to discuss some of the issues themselves. For example, “Do you assume that you and your partner share the same HIV status?”, or “How is it going talking to your best friend about safe sex?”, or “Has your best friend asked you about being safe?”, or “Do you know where you can get an HIV test?”, or “Have you ever gone to get tested for HIV with a friend?”

Supporting Informal Outreach through the use of promotional materials

Creating written materials that directly discuss the need to talk with friends about safer sex and testing, and then distributing the materials through outreach activities as well as displaying them in the Project space (or both) is another way to stimulate discussions of safer sex and testing. When Outreach Team volunteers plan their materials, make sure they include information about the need to talk with one’s friends about safer sex.

Messages used in Informal Outreach

The messages that men can give to each other about having safer sex and getting tested should vary over time. Young men who only say, “Hey, remember to have safer sex!” will quickly tire of saying this repeatedly—and their friends are likely to tire of hearing it. Messages can go far deeper. Men can discuss issues that are associated with why young gay/bisexual men have unsafe sex. For example, after attending a forum on spirituality and health in which safer sex was discussed as a part of caring for yourself, a young man was then able to discuss his thoughts on what he learned with
friends. Ideas about how to eroticize safer sex can be discussed with friends as well, as can planning ahead to have sex by carrying condoms and lubes when going out to a bar. Men who are encouraging their friends to get tested for HIV can talk about good places to get tested, and how the new HIV screening tests no longer require drawing blood. There are a great many issues that can be discussed. What can also be discussed is the idea that being a friend means you discuss these issues.

In our work with Projects that focus on African American men, an issue that often comes up is concern that someone who asks you about your sexual activities may “spread your business” to others if you reveal anything. This is an important issue: if the young men are asking their friends about what they are doing sexually, there must be utmost reassurance that gossiping about the friend’s sexual practices will not occur. However, it is not necessary to ask someone about their sexual practices or HIV status when conducting informal outreach. Discussions about sexuality can occur without the need to reveal anything personal. Friends can urge each other to be safe without disclosing to each other what they are doing sexually.

Another way to be supportive to a friend is to go together to get tested. After talking about the importance of getting tested, sometimes it will come out that a young man is fearful of what he might find out, and he really wants a friend to accompany him to obtain a test. Certainly this is a wonderful way of providing support, and of course it requires complete confidentiality on the part of the companion.

The issue of gossip is a challenging and difficult issue in many young gay/bisexual men’s communities. Consciousness-raising discussions about gossip and spreading each others’ business is an issue that should be visited and revisited in Mpowerment Projects. Informal outreach should never be used as a way of obtaining information about a guy, and then spreading it to others.

Address the issue of gossip!
Objectives

This module focuses on all the ins and outs of M-groups, the small group component of the Mpowerment Project, and answers the following questions:

1. What are M-groups?
2. How were they developed?
3. What happens in M-groups?
4. How are facilitators trained?
5. What are the most effective ways to recruit young men to the M-groups?
6. What about scheduling, record-keeping, and evaluation of M-groups?

A detailed description of how to run M-groups can be found in Module 13: M-group Facilitator’s Guide. An abbreviated outline that can be used while actually facilitating M-groups can be found in Module 14: M-group Meeting Guide.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module:

- Figure 9.1 Formula for estimating the number of young gay/bisexual men in the community
- Figure 9.2 Sample M-group call log
- Figure 9.3 Sample M-group reminder e-mail
- Figure 9.4 Sample M-group reminder letter
- Figure 9.5 Sample M-group attendance log
Core Elements

1 Coordinator(s)

2 Core Group & other volunteers

3 Project Space

4 Formal Outreach (including Social Outreach Events & Outreach Teams)

5 M-groups

6 Informal Outreach (which is a focus on talking with & encouraging friends & acquaintances to be safe & get tested for HIV)

7 Publicity campaign

8 Community Advisory Board (optional)

Guiding Principles

Social focus

Empowerment philosophy

Peer Influence of safer sex messages

Multi-level approach

Gay-positive/sexc-positive

Community-building

Diffusion of innovations
What are M-groups?

M-groups are peer-led, one-time meetings of 8 to 10 young gay/bisexual men that give participants an opportunity to talk openly about HIV prevention issues. The meetings, which usually last about three hours, are an extremely important part of the Mpowerment Project. M-groups make it possible for young gay/bisexual men to meet and get to know one another in a relaxed, supportive, and enjoyable setting. The groups help young men to confront issues and feelings that they may not ordinarily face, and relate to other young men in a deep and profound way. In the communities where we have worked, we have often found that M-groups are transforming, bonding experiences for participants and that this promotes the community-building goal of the Mpowerment Project. Participants focus on their own sexual behavior and the risks involved, the need for HIV testing, and learn to support their friends about safer sex and testing, thereby building a stronger and healthier community.
What happens in M-groups?

M-groups serve a number of purposes:

- They help focus attention on issues about HIV prevention, including how to have safer sex and the importance of knowing your HIV status.
- They serve as an introduction to the Mpowerment Project and as an invitation to become involved with it.
- They mobilize men to support their friends about having safer sex.

It is hoped that each young man who attends an M-group will be so motivated by the experience that he will choose to attend other Project activities, such as Social Outreach Events, or will volunteer for activities sponsored by the Project. Generally groups are co-facilitated by two young men—usually the Project Coordinators—although specially trained Core Group members or other volunteer facilitators can also lead groups effectively. M-groups are usually held at the Project space, but they can be held in participants’ homes or other locations convenient for young men. The groups start off fairly light in tone, and evolve over the meeting into addressing deeper and more emotionally charged issues—but men are never required to share deeper issues with the group unless they feel the desire to do so. M-groups are intended to be bonding experiences, with men usually leaving the group desiring to support their friends to be safer sexually.

It is best to start M-groups soon after other Mpowerment Project activities are underway, such as larger and smaller Social Outreach Events. Once the word gets out in the community that the Project holds fun, well-run events, young men will be more likely to attend the M-groups. We have found this to be the case in many places, where it becomes much easier to recruit men for the M-groups once the reputation of the Project has spread throughout the community. However, don’t delay starting M-groups for too long after beginning Social Outreach Events, or you may miss the opportunity to recruit some young gay/bisexual men to attend an M-group.

Adapting M-groups for specific racial/ethnic target populations

We’ve learned from our research that in order for the Mpowerment Project to be successful, all of the Core Elements need to be implemented and adapted to the special needs of each community. In other words, fidelity and adaptation work best. However, because M-groups are the most scripted Core Element of the Project, it can be particularly challenging to figure out how to adapt M-groups while retaining their essential lessons and key characteristics.

When adapting M-groups for specific racial/ethnic target populations, agencies may feel that many other issues and challenges for particular groups of young gay/bisexual men also need to be addressed in addition to those focused on in the M-groups. We’ve seen agencies attempt to address these issues by expanding the M-groups, so that they go beyond one-time groups.
focused on negotiating safer sex and the importance of talking to friends about the need to be safe. However, from our work with diverse Projects, we have come to the conclusion that adding additional sessions to the M-groups makes the intervention more complex and harder to implement, since it requires substantial effort to get men back into these groups for a second or third session. Instead, we believe that it’s preferable to adapt the M-groups so that they’re culturally appropriate without adding a second or third session. Instead, additional issues the men may face can and should be addressed elsewhere in the Project.

For example, when Mpowerment Detroit began implementing the Mpowerment Project for young gay/bisexual African American men, they quickly realized that there were many issues that the guys wanted to talk about but there wasn’t enough time to address them in the M-groups. As a result, they began a series of discussion groups held on Sunday evenings immediately following a family style meal. Topics included relationships, HIV testing, adoption, domestic abuse, and any other topic of importance to the participants. This adaptation of the original concept enabled the Project to keep the M-groups as one-time events for those new to the program—and at the same time made it possible to address many other issues of concern to the young gay/bisexual men already involved in the Project. Other Projects have addressed these issues through various Social Outreach Events.

**Format and process of M-groups**

M-groups are designed to be fun and interactive, and they include structured exercises, informal discussion, and role-plays. This reflects one of the underlying Guiding Principles of the Mpowerment Project—to empower young gay/bisexual men. We tried a variety of exercises and approaches that dealt with HIV prevention issues and community building in order to find those that went over best with young men.

The M-group experience is based on cognitive-behavioral theory. This theory suggests that people are more likely to adopt new behaviors if they practice them—or if they observe others demonstrating them—within a rewarding and supportive environment. The basic ingredients of the M-group have remained fairly constant over the years. However, what has changed is the “script” of written exercises that facilitators use to lead the group. Due to the fact that each community has its own unique experiences, needs, and culture, the script has been designed to be adapted to each community. For example, each community will want to change the names of settings and characters in the role-plays to reflect their own community.

One of the strengths of M-groups is that they help participants think for themselves about the issues being discussed, and come up with solutions that work for them. This reflects one of the underlying Guiding Principles of the Mpowerment Project—to empower young gay/bisexual men. Facilitators accomplish this by helping group participants engage in a self-reflection process about safer sex, and by acknowledging that there is never only “one way” to deal with safer sex issues. After each group activity the participants are encouraged to discuss their thoughts on the topic and learn from each
other’s experiences. In this way, it is hoped that they will leave the group feeling more capable, empowered, and secure in their own ability to have safer sex, and be more willing to support their friends in doing the same.

**Helping young men address reasons for having unsafe sex**

Research has identified a number of factors that contribute to unsafe sex among young gay/bisexual men that need to be addressed in the M-groups. These are the most “proximal” factors—that is, the reasons that are most closely connected with why young men are at risk sexually. (To be sure, other more distant factors are also involved with why young gay/bisexual men are at risk, such as internalized racism and homophobia, little future time perspective, poor self-esteem. These are or can be addressed in other parts of the Project, but M-groups focus on immediate issues involved in risk-taking behavior). They include:

- Uncertainty about what is unsafe and safer sex
- Beliefs that safer sex is boring and not fun
- Poor communication skills for negotiating safer sex
- Beliefs that it is difficult to get a partner to have safer sex with you
- Interpersonal issues that may interfere with safer sex
- Lack of planning ahead to have safer sex
- Lack of perceived social norms that support safer sex and knowing your current HIV status
- Lack of knowledge of correct use of condoms
- Social support to have safer sex and to get tested

For additional information about these factors, see *Module 1: Overview*, which provides an overview of the research and principles underlying the Mpowerment Project.
Sometimes service providers ask if these issues are still relevant to today’s young gay/bisexual men or if they should be “updated.” We have found that young gay/bisexual men continue having unsafe sex for many of the same reasons that they did back in the 1990s. Many still do not know how to negotiate safer sex, or are unclear about some of the issues regarding unprotected sex. Interpersonal issues continue to make it difficult for some men to practice safer sex. For example, some men find it difficult to initiate the topic of safer sex with a new partner because they fear rejection. For others, entering a love relationship can make it harder to practice safer sex because they may want to stop using condoms prematurely (i.e., before both partners know their HIV status, have developed an adequate level of trust to warrant unprotected sex, and have discussed what they would do if one slips up and has unprotected anal sex with someone else).

The M-groups help young gay/bisexual men deal with these issues, which is why they remain so important. Additionally, it is important to remember that young men come out as gay or bisexual all the time, so may not yet have encountered basic HIV prevention information. The M-groups reinforce “the basics” for the men who already know them, and the groups may provide other young men with this important information for the first time in an appealing and effective manner.

Unfortunately, not all men who engage in high-risk sexual activities are likely to attend M-groups, no matter how well they are marketed. Unlike more traditional safer sex workshops, however, M-groups also motivate and train participants how to speak informally with their friends outside the group and encourage them to practice safer sex and get tested for HIV. This expression of support to friends is what the Project calls “Informal Outreach” (See Module 8: Informal Outreach for a more detailed description). Consequently, both group participants and others in their social networks benefit from M-groups.

**Content of M-groups**

Here is a brief summary of what takes place during each M-group:

1. **Welcome** The facilitators welcome participants, describe the Project and its goals, and the purpose of the M-group. The facilitators then present ground rules for the group to make the men feel safe participating in it, and to encourage them to relax, to participate fully, and to have a good time.

2. **Introductions** The facilitators then get the men to take part in an amusing “ice-breaker” to introduce them to one another and to feel more at ease participating in the group.

3. **Interpersonal Issues** The first topic the group addresses—issues related to meeting and getting to know other young men—is not directly HIV-specific. However, it is usually very engaging for group members and provides a context for discussing the sexual topics that follow. In this section, the participants role-play various scenarios dealing with meeting another man in a bar or asking a casual acquaintance for a date.
4 **Safer sex guidelines** The facilitators pass out a list of safer sex guidelines and the group discusses questions or thoughts they may have about them. It has been our experience that participants tend to be fairly knowledgeable about the guidelines. Therefore, the facilitators do not spend much time elaborating on them. Instead, they try to clear up misconceptions that participants may have (“Unprotected intercourse is safe if you withdraw before ejaculating”) and help them resolve areas of confusion (“I’ve heard different claims about how safe oral sex really is”).

5 **How to have fun, hot safer sex** Since research shows that many young men perceive low-risk activities to be less enjoyable than high-risk behaviors, the group next performs an exercise designed to help them think more creatively about safer sex. Participants are divided into groups of three or four and given a large sheet of paper with the name of a body part (ass, dick, mouth, or hands) written on it. The groups are then asked to brainstorm and write down as many fun, erotic, safe acts they can do with that body part. Each group then reports to the entire group the list of behaviors they came up with, and the group discusses each list, adding any new suggestions anyone else thinks of that would go well with the body part.

6 **Fun with condoms** Next, the group does an exercise designed to show the correct use of a condom. The facilitators divide the group into pairs and ask each pair to reach into a bag and pull out an object. Inside the bag are an assortment of different dildos and humorous, phallic-shaped objects. The facilitators then demonstrate how to put a condom on a dildo, while the pairs follow along using the object they picked. Participants are then given gift packages filled with an assortment of different types of condoms and lubricants for them to take home and sample.

7 **Negotiating safer sex** Following a short break, the group focuses on strategies for communicating about safer sex with partners. First, the facilitators read a scenario about a young man getting ready for a first date with a guy with whom he may have sex. The group is asked to brainstorm things they could do before the date to make it likely that any sex that occurs is safe. (Examples might include: have condoms readily available near the bed; have a safer sex poster on the wall; carry condoms with you; avoid getting drunk, etc.) Since much of the prelude to sex is nonverbal, this exercise attempts to help the men think of ways they can engineer sexual situations in such a way that they increase the likelihood of safer sex happening.

Next, the group is presented with a scenario about being in a sexual situation with a partner. First, the group discusses the situation, and then role-plays...
verbal and nonverbal ways to suggest safer sex, first to a willing partner, and next to a reluctant partner. Since the most common situation in which young gay/bisexual men have unsafe sex is within a boyfriend relationship, the next exercise asks participants to divide into pairs and role-play a scenario in which they suggest to a boyfriend with whom they have never had safer sex, that they start having safer sex now. After each role-play, participants describe how they handled the situation.

8 Informal Outreach/encouraging friends to have safer sex
This important section of the M-group is intended to motivate and train participants to encourage their friends to have safer sex. The facilitators introduce the topic by discussing the importance of encouraging their friends to engage in safer sex, and about the reality that if young gay/bisexual men do not support their friends to be safe, who will? Next, the facilitators discuss with the group specific ways they can encourage their friends. Participants then role-play two scenarios that give them an opportunity to practice doing this. Afterward, participants are then asked to make a commitment to invite several of their friends to an M-group, and the facilitators provide them with M-group invitations and safer sex packages to give to their friends.

9 Invitation to join the Mpowerment Project
The facilitators conclude the groups by inviting participants to become involved with the Mpowerment Project, and announce upcoming Project events and volunteer opportunities. Participants are given buttons or some other item such as keychain lanyards containing the Mpowerment Project logo, and are asked to wear them to show their support for the Project and its mission. It is hoped that wearing the buttons will trigger conversations among their friends and acquaintances about the Project and will serve as a reminder about the importance of practicing safer sex.

10 Informal socializing
Following the M-group, participants are invited to socialize with the other group members and the facilitators. When M-groups are held in a Project’s space, participants may also want to meet any other Mpowerment Project volunteers who may be around and explore the Project space and its resources.

Why the M-group Includes role-plays
Many group participants will tell you that they hate role-plays. This comes as no surprise. Even some group facilitators are wary of role-plays during their own training sessions. Participating in role-plays can feel awkward or embarrassing, and they make some people feel self-conscious, as if they are onstage. So why use them? Role-plays offer learning opportunities that group discussions do not. Research has shown a number of reasons why role-plays are a valuable tool for learning and practicing new social behaviors.

First, conducting role-plays in a group allows participants to experience peer support and positive reinforcement for behaviors that could end up saving their lives one day. This type of peer support has been shown by research to be a powerful factor in practicing safer sex. Additionally, the role-plays give participants a chance to practice these behaviors in a safe and supportive environment outside of the pressure of a sexual encounter.
In selecting M-group facilitators, look for sensitivity, a sense of humor, and the ability to draw people out.

Second, role-playing requires you to “think on your feet.” Scientific studies have demonstrated that role-playing a real-life situation—as opposed to merely talking about it—makes it much more likely a participant will be able to handle the situation when it actually occurs in his own life. Watching a role-play unfold is also more helpful to those in the group who are observing it than if they had only talked about it.

Third, role-plays are an excellent way for the facilitators to see first-hand if a participant has mastered a new skill. Role-plays have been used for a long time in psychology because they can measure the acquisition of new skills very well. They are often used to evaluate the effectiveness of trainings because they can identify strong and weak areas. They are also widely and effectively used with a variety of different populations. It is important to realize that the group will generally follow the lead of the facilitators when it comes to role-plays. If the facilitators approach role-plays with enthusiasm and excitement, group members will follow suit. Group members who are motivated to be part of a role-play will often bring to it some of the most sensitive and important experiences of their lives. Our experience has shown that role-plays often become emotional and set in motion significant, positive life changes among participants.

One final word about role-plays: although some group members may complain about them at first, many find them extremely beneficial afterwards. Role-plays are often mentioned on M-group evaluations as the thing participants liked most about the groups.

Selecting M-group facilitators

One of the keys to the success of M-groups is that they are run by peers—other young men who are close in age to the participants. It is tremendously empowering for young men to attend a group run by someone with whom they can identify. In selecting M-group facilitators, previous experience in facilitating groups is very helpful. Even more important, however, are the following personal qualities: sensitivity, interpersonal skills, a sense of humor, flexibility, the ability to put people at ease, and the ability to draw people out. When selecting facilitators, we strongly recommend that applicants be observed facilitating a mock discussion group to get a sense of their abilities. Since M-groups are co-facilitated, it is very helpful to pair less experienced facilitators with men who are more experienced.
How to train M-group facilitators

The effectiveness of the M-group will depend, to a great degree, on the talents and skills of the facilitators. Over the course of running the Mpowerment Project in your community, facilitators will move on and new individuals will need to be trained to become facilitators. Fortunately, good facilitation skills can be learned. We have developed an effective system for training M-group facilitators. Below we discuss the six elements of our M-group facilitator training.

1 Use Module 13: M-group Facilitator’s Guide This guide includes a step-by-step script for running an M-group, along with helpful tips about how to make the groups run smoothly and how to make them more enjoyable for participants. Listed at the beginning of each section are objectives, followed by an actual script of what to say. All key points that the facilitator should emphasize are highlighted. Facilitators should study this guide carefully in order to become familiar with the content of the M-group. We have found that training prospective M-group facilitators works best when the trainees have carefully read the entire guide before working with the Training Video (described in the next section). The Facilitator’s Guide also explains the purposes and theoretical rationale for the various M-group activities. While the guide provides a word-by-word script for the M-group, facilitators are encouraged to speak naturally and use their own words when covering the material. The guide also discusses common issues that may arise in running M-groups, and provides numerous tips for avoiding specific problems and dealing with difficult situations. As stated earlier, the M-group Facilitator’s Guide is Module 13 of the manual, and individual copies can be downloaded by logging on to [www.mpowerment.org](http://www.mpowerment.org).

Also included in this manual is Module 14: M-group Meeting Guide. This guide contains only the script—what the facilitator says—and not the explanations or tips contained in the full guide. We have found it is more practical to use this abbreviated guide when actually facilitating groups.

2 Use the M-group Facilitator Training Video The M-group Facilitator Training Video guides prospective facilitators through each section of the M-group by providing models of how to conduct the group and offering additional tips. The 45-minute video is designed to be used interactively. For each section, the trainer should do the following with the trainees (the potential M-group facilitators): 1) discuss the goals and key issues for that section; 2) observe the corresponding part of the video; 3) stop the tape and discuss what was seen; and 4) practice facilitating that section using copies of the M-group Meeting Guide. Following this procedure, the trainer then coaches and encourages prospective facilitators to discuss how the practice went and brainstorm alternative ways of handling the situation.

3 Provide Facilitation Skills Training Certain facilitation skills are basic to running a group successfully. For example, all facilitators should know how to establish rapport with a group, listen actively, paraphrase, manage participants who talk too much, draw out shy participants, and deal with conflict among group members. It is beyond the scope of this manual to provide a comprehensive training in facilitation skills. In most communities, there are experts in group facilitation who may be willing to help train your facilitators. Some local colleges offer continuing adult education classes.
on this topic. Other communities offer similar trainings through Parks and Recreation programs, adult learning classes, or community mediation programs. Local AIDS service organizations often have case managers or counselors who may be able to help your staff and volunteers learn group facilitation skills. We strongly recommend that local experts be asked to participate in trainings on general facilitation skills for prospective M-group facilitators.

4 Encourage Facilitators to Gain HIV Expertise The M-group covers basic safer sex guidelines that the facilitators should be able to explain. It is beyond the scope of this manual to provide a comprehensive overview of all the HIV-related information that facilitators should learn to effectively lead M-groups. However, one particularly good and regularly updated Web resource on many issues related to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases is found at www.sfcityclinic.org/stdbasics. The website contains accurate and complete information on HIV transmission, prevention, testing, and other relevant issues.

It is important for facilitators to develop a good understanding of HIV issues, particularly the facts of HIV transmission and prevention. For this reason, facilitators should undergo HIV trainings with local experts to gain an understanding of HIV transmission and other relevant HIV issues. This will increase the facilitators’ sense of confidence in presenting the safer sex guidelines and enhance their credibility in responding to the various questions that arise. It is also important to learn about sexually transmitted infections (STI), since a guy with an STI is more likely to contract HIV, and if an HIV-positive guy contracts an STI it can impact his immune function and his viral load can increase.

Facilitators should also have a list of referral sources that they can direct participants to and that they themselves can turn to when they have questions, and especially where guys can go to get an HIV test in a comfortable environment.

The knowledge base surrounding HIV is continually growing. Although it is important that the facilitators have a good working knowledge of basic HIV issues— and particularly regarding transmission—they are not expected to be experts. The reasons most young gay/bisexual men sometimes engage in high-risk sexual practices are not generally due to a lack of knowledge. Usually these reasons are more often related to difficulties with motivation,
communication, or negotiation skills. Therefore, group facilitators do not need to know “all there is to know” about HIV. The main focus of the M-groups, therefore, should remain on building skills to make it easier to negotiate safer sex and to make it more enjoyable—and not on HIV transmission or treatment issues.

5 Conduct Practice Groups Once prospective facilitators have gone through a formal training, it is extremely important that they have time to sharpen their facilitation skills with practice M-groups. An excellent way of doing this is to invite Core Group members to serve as practice group participants. In addition to providing a supportive first audience so the Coordinators and other facilitator trainees can practice their new facilitation skills, participating in the practice groups is also a convenient way for Core Group members to become more familiar with the issues addressed in the M-group. It can also serve as a valuable bonding experience for Core Group members, and increase their sense of ownership and understanding of the M-group.

It is very helpful for the trainer to sit in on practice M-groups with prospective facilitators to help fine-tune their skills. After the group is over, the trainer can discuss with the group his or her observations while the experience is still fresh in everyone’s mind. We have found it preferable to do this after the group participants have left. This way, the prospective facilitators may feel more comfortable receiving feedback, and the trainer can speak more openly.

6 Have Prospective Facilitators Sit in on M-groups In addition to the above steps, we have found that the most effective way of training new facilitators is to have them sit in on as many M-groups as they can. Initially this should be done as a participant-observer, and then as an apprentice who gradually takes on increasing responsibility for leading sections of the group while being mentored by experienced co-facilitators.

Strategies for recruiting men to M-groups

As stated earlier, not all young gay/bisexual men in any community are likely to attend an M-group. However, there are still many actions a Project can take to attract as many participants as possible. The following sections will give you some helpful suggestions about: 1) general considerations when developing an approach to market the M-groups in your community, 2) specific marketing activities that we have found useful, 3) recruiting approaches that have been successful, and 4) logistical tips regarding scheduling, record keeping, and evaluation.

Achieve a critical mass “Diffusion of Innovations Theory” accounts for how new behaviors spread throughout a community (See Module 1: Overview). Simply put, it states that if 15-20% of a particular group adopt a new behavior and let their friends know that they are practicing it, the behavior will spread naturally throughout the rest of the community. For example, the theory has been used to describe the explosive rise in the use of technologies such as the Internet and fax machines. Another
The goal is to have 15% to 20% of young gay/bisexual men in the community attend an M-group.

Example is how groups of friends are quick to adopt a new catchy phrase or fashion made popular by an influential person. In much the same way, young gay/bisexual men can spread the norm of safer sex. Therefore, the goal of the Mpowerment Project is to have at least 15-20% of the young gay/bisexual men in your community attend an M-group. (See Figure 9.1 in the Appendix to this module for a guide about how to estimate the number of gay/bisexual men in your community). Once they do, it is likely that the safer sex message will spread naturally through existing friendship networks within the community.

**Make sure groups reflect the community's diversity**

It is important that the composition of men attending the M-groups reflects the composition of your community. (See Module 2: Community Assessment for more information about how to assess the different groups of young gay/bisexual men in your community.)

**Emphasize the social aspect of M-groups**

We promote M-groups as a fun way for young gay/bisexual men to meet other young men; hear how other young men are dealing with issues of importance to them, such as sex, dating, and relationships; and find out more about the Mpowerment Project. All men who are interested in being involved with the Mpowerment Project should be encouraged to attend an M-group as an “entry” into the Project. It is very important not to describe M-groups as “safer sex workshops.” We have found this is an immediate turn-off for most young men, and particularly for those who would benefit most from attending. (See below, “M-group Recruiting: What to Say, How to Say It”).

**Be creative and keep trying**

Since no one method will reach all the men you want to attend M-groups, use many different approaches. You may find that different approaches work at different times, and that recruiting participants is easier during some periods than during others. Keep trying new methods and improving upon ones you’ve already used even when your recruitment efforts are going slowly. Also keep contacting those men who have been contacted numerous times before without success. As the reputation of the Project and its M-groups spreads through the community, these men may become more open to participating. Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team describes in greater detail some methods of recruiting men at outreach activities to M-groups. (However, we briefly review those below, and suggest additional methods).

**Let others catch your enthusiasm**

Although recruiting men to M-groups is not always easy, the vast majority of guys tell us they really enjoyed the groups and found them to be a valuable experience. Furthermore, many lasting friendships have been made among men who met at a group. You will be more effective in recruiting guys to M-groups if you believe in the importance and value of the groups, and if you are warm, enthusiastic, sincere—even charming! Most of all, be persistent, but don’t be...
pushy. You needn’t feel any reluctance at bringing up the topic of M-groups when you have the opportunity.

**Use a teamwork approach** Since recruitment is a large task and there are so many different recruitment strategies, we have found it helpful for the M-group Coordinator to work with a team of volunteers. The use of volunteers effectively multiplies the efforts of the M-group Coordinator. Volunteers should be highly motivated and taught how to describe the M-groups so that they sound appealing. *(See below, “M-group Recruiting: What to Say, How to Say It”).* There are many jobs that volunteers can perform, such as making initial recruitment phone calls, calling to remind men of an upcoming M-group, networking with their friends and acquaintances, inviting men to attend Project-sponsored events, and so forth. Working successfully with a team of volunteers is an acquired skill, and requires careful attention to a number of things, including coordinating volunteer activities, evaluating the success of events, and keeping volunteers motivated. As suggested in Module 3, volunteers always appreciate tokens of appreciation for their efforts and commitment, and respond positively to little things such as thank you notes and snacks.

**Specific marketing activities for M-groups**

**Mpowerment Project Social Outreach Events** Whenever formal outreach is done at bars or other community venues, every safer sex promotional material should include some way of promoting the M-groups. This could be a panel in the material with a description and contact information for M-groups, or a separate card included inside with general information about M-groups or the date and time and RSVP information for the next upcoming M-group. An approach we have found that works well is to invite men who show up at Mpowerment Project Social Outreach Events to attend an M-group. One of the important functions of Social Outreach Events is to attract new young men to the Project and to collect their names and contact information so you can invite each and every one of them to attend an M-group. Men who have a good time at an event will likely be more receptive to attending an M-group. As explained in Module 5: Core Group and Other Volunteers, there are many ways to record the names and phone numbers of men who attend the Project’s large Social Outreach Events. But every Project-sponsored event—whether large or small—should be used as a means of recruiting men to the M-groups.

Soon after each Social Outreach Event, it is extremely important to contact every person who was there. It is vital to be thorough in your follow-up with the names collected at each event. This is a critical time to invite each person who attends an event to become more fully involved in the Project by attending an M-group and to welcome them into the community that your Project is creating. We have found that if you do not follow up on a participant’s interest sheet, he is likely to receive the impression that he is not wanted or welcome in the Project.
Community social settings

During an outreach performance at gay bars or other appropriate community venues, Project volunteers can distribute flyers or promotional cards that explain what an M-group is and how to sign up for one. We have found that this approach is more successful than when volunteers, dressed in their regular clothes, approach strangers in bars and ask them to come to an M-group. Additionally, if the community venues have places (e.g., bulletin boards, empty wall space, kiosks) where M-group flyers or cards can be displayed, it is usually a good idea to have M-group promotional materials visible in these locations as well.

Networking with friends

Word of mouth is the best publicity, and it is likely to be the most powerful tool for sparking interest in attending M-groups. Recruitment is most successful when Coordinators, Core Group members, previous M-group participants, and all Project volunteers and supporters strongly encourage their friends to attend an M-group.

Perhaps the most effective method of recruitment is using the Coordinators’ and Core Group’s personal contacts. Working with friends provides a good foundation for beginning the networking process. In order not to overlook any potential group participants, the Coordinators and Core Group members should each make a list of all the young gay/bisexual men they know, and attempt to recruit them to the groups. After these friends have gone through the groups, they can in turn be asked to encourage their friends to attend the groups.

It is important that everyone who is helping to recruit men to M-groups—including the M-group Coordinator, Core Group members, and other volunteers—be taught how to describe the groups (See below, “M-group Recruiting: What to Say, How to Say It”). Recruitment is most successful when friends are invited to the groups in a positive, upbeat manner—delivered in much the same way as invitations to a party or other social event.

Community networking

Establishing and maintaining relationships with different groups is not only helpful for getting a sense of the “pulse” of the community regarding the Project, but also is a means of reaching out to wider social networks for M-group recruitment. Recruiting M-group participants through other organizations seems to be most successful when the M-group Coordinator develops a positive working relationship with various community leaders (e.g., campus organizers, bartenders, club managers, ethnic/racial group organizers, queer activists, political activists). This kind of networking involves more than a phone call, and usually necessitates an in-person meeting of some kind to discuss the importance of the Project and the M-groups in particular.

It is also helpful for other organizations to have a basic understanding of M-groups so that when they encounter someone who would be appropriate for the group they can make a referral. Ideally, the M-group Coordinator, or someone else from the Project, should meet with staff at each appropriate community organization to discuss the M-group’s goals, logistics, and referral procedures.
We have found it most helpful if the referral is made to the M-group Coordinator himself, rather than to the Project in general. When possible, we recommend that organizations give the names and phone numbers of contacts (after securing permission to do so) directly to the M-group Coordinator. Therefore, it is helpful for a Coordinator from the Project to meet with staff at the community organizations to discuss the best ways to refer individuals to each other’s programs. It is also useful for each organization to have M-group brochures, flyers, or cards on display.

Counselors, HIV prevention professionals, teachers, people atgay community organizations, as well as other community leaders can be very helpful in getting the message out about the value of M-groups and supplying the Project with contacts.

### Gay community events

Recruitment efforts should also focus on all of the gay and/or AIDS-related activities occurring in the community. Because these often draw large numbers of young gay/bisexual men who are looking for ways to connect with other men their age, they are an excellent place to make new contacts. We are often asked, “Sure, but how do I approach a stranger and begin telling them about the M-groups?” The best way is simply to walk up and begin chatting. Tell them about the Project, and personally invite them to attend an M-group. Generally, these men are willing to provide their name, phone number, and e-mail address. After they have had a personal contact with someone from the Project they will usually feel more comfortable attending a group.

### Publicity and advertising

Flyers, posters, and newspaper ads are very important to get the word out about M-groups. An excellent way to get free publicity is by writing an article about the Project for a college, alternative, or gay newspaper and including information about the M-groups. However, don’t count on swarms of young men flocking to M-groups because they saw an enticing flyer, poster, or even a great article. Advertising materials should be used in addition to other more active, personal recruitment strategies, or as another way of promoting a Project-sponsored outreach event. For example, when volunteers approach young men about M-groups, the volunteers can also give them a flyer. Similarly, an invitation to attend an M-group may be better received if the person has previously read an article or seen an ad about M-groups. Module 10: Publicizing the Mpowerment Project contains many additional pointers on publicity.

### Mobilizing the Core Group

From the start, get the Core Group committed to reaching your goal of recruiting 15-20% of the young gay/bisexual men in the community into M-groups. As a starting point, make sure the Core Group understands that the M-groups are central to one of the Project’s main purposes—helping young men learn to practice safer sex and support each
other in that goal. Make sure that all Core Group members have attended
at least one M-group, and encourage those who are interested in becoming
M-group facilitators.

The Core Group can help you reach your goal. Here are
some ways the Core Group can boost your success with
M-groups:

- brainstorm solutions to recruitment challenges
- assist the M-group Coordinator in identifying people for M-groups
- become M-group facilitators
- participate in mock M-groups where new facilitators are being trained
- tell their friends about what M-groups are
- bring their friends to an M-group
- help publicize M-groups
- attend at least one M-group
- encourage those who are interested in becoming M-group
  facilitators to do so

Be sure to get Core Group members to state what tasks they agree to help
with and to be as specific as possible about them. If they do, they will be more
likely to follow through.

Evaluate your recruitment activities

It is important to critically evaluate your recruitment methods, and not
just give up if they are not successful. One way to evaluate your methods is
to keep notes of what methods are being used, what hours phone calls are
being made, and what messages are being left at the Project, since all of this
information can be reviewed to see if some methods are working better than
others. Keep trying new methods of recruitment, modifying old methods, and
evaluating what methods are most and least successful.

If you find you’ve run out of names of men who have attended larger
Mpowerment Project Social Outreach Events and are constantly checking
for new faces at Project-sponsored outreach activities, it’s probably time
to begin a new round of networking with friends, acquaintances, Core
Group members, guys who have gone through M-groups, and community
organizations. Consider if your advertising and publicity methods are as
effective as possible or need to be changed. The point is that recruitment
activities need constant evaluation and adjustment to be most successful.
Different approaches work at different times, so it is best not to settle into
one approach that you expect to work all the time.
**M-group recruiting:** what to say, how to say it

- use positive and enthusiastic descriptions
- emphasize that the M-groups are fun, novel, and interesting
- mention free food, drink, and gifts
- describe the social aspect of the groups, where participants get a chance to meet other guys their age. This is particularly important if you live in a community where there are few places to meet other young gay/bisexual men
- stress that the M-groups offer an opportunity to make an important difference in the community

**Points to cover**

It is important to convey to everyone the importance of portraying the group in the following way, but using your own words:

> It is a one-time, introductory, fun, social, and casual orientation to the new community center where you’ll have a chance to meet other guys and talk about issues of importance to young gay/bisexual men including dating, relationships, community, friendships, and sex.

Below we explain what is meant by some of these terms. Become familiar with this information so you can bring it up when talking to guys about taking part in an M-group:

**One-time, introductory**

This is an important message because you want people to realize that you’re only talking about attending for one evening full of fun and information, as opposed to making an ongoing commitment to something such as a multi-session group.

**Fun, social**

Young guys want to have a good time. They are not likely to come to something that seems boring, dry, or preachy, and many are not likely to show up if they think it will simply be another safer sex workshop.

**Casual, non-threatening**

This is important for a few reasons. Many guys are new to the gay community and are just beginning the process of dealing with their sexuality or developing a positive gay identity. Still others may not even completely identify with the community. These guys might feel scared or uncomfortable about coming to a group that seems threatening or that might “out” them. Regardless, they all need the information and support provided in the M-groups.
Also, because many people are shy about making new friends or attending new groups, they might feel a bit intimidated at first. This is why it is so important to communicate that the M-group is very informal and confidential. Make sure the men you talk with understand that it is not a group where they will be put on the spot or forced to divulge personal information to people they don’t know.

**Community center and community building** This is a very attractive aspect of the group for many young men, so don’t forget to tell them about it. You will be introducing them to a community center that is just for young gay/bisexual men. This is a place where they can hang out during the center’s drop-in hours, socialize, and meet other guys, which leads us to the next point in this list.

**Meeting guys and socializing** Our surveys have consistently found that young gay/bisexual men want a place outside of the bar scene where they can meet other guys and socialize. The Mpowerment Project space offers them exactly this. There they can make new friends, build social support systems, and become part of a strong and healthy community.

**Discussing important issues** Many young gay/bisexual men are interested in learning new ways to enjoy erotic safer sex. However, we have found it best not to describe the group as a safer sex workshop since doing so will turn many guys off. Also, focusing on safer sex when describing the M-group sells the group short because many other issues are discussed during the group as well. Even though group participants enjoy the brainstorming section on erotic safer sex and learn a lot in the M-group about how to communicate their desire for safer sex and negotiate successfully with their partners, we have found that the safer sex component is not the best marketing tool. Instead, we stress that the M-groups provide a chance to talk about many issues that are important to young gay/bisexual men including relationships, dating, meeting guys, community, friendships, and sex. Yet it is important not to misrepresent the group either because it certainly does cover issues such as HIV and safer sex. But don’t make these elements the selling point when trying to recruit someone to an M-group.

**Starting the conversation** How do you begin talking about the M-groups to a relative stranger? It’s probably easier and more natural to begin the conversation by talking about the existence of the Project space, particularly if it is used as a young gay/bisexual men’s community center. Most men will be curious to learn more about the center and what’s happening there. (If you’re physically at the center, you might also give them a short tour.) Once you’ve sparked their interest, you can describe the M-group as the starting point for finding out more about the Project and the center.
A few Do’s and Don’ts

**DO** smile, be friendly, and turn the charm on. Psyche yourself up. Let others catch your enthusiasm for the M-group.

**DO NOT** pressure guys to participate, but make sure you communicate the main points listed above in a clear, somewhat subtle, but warm manner.

**DO** be yourself (natural, friendly, sincere) and get to know the person a bit before telling him about the center or the M-group. If he’s more comfortable with you, he’ll be more receptive.

**DO NOT** describe the M-group as a safer sex workshop or a place where you just talk about HIV or AIDS. Remember the underlying principle of the program that most young gay/bisexual men are not interested in attending activities or being involved in a Project that only focuses on HIV or AIDS. Make sure personal communications, advertisements, and other publicity also conform to this guideline.

Practice, practice, practice

It’s up to the M-group Coordinator to develop effective ways of describing the M-groups so young men will want to attend them. He is also responsible for teaching the Core Group and volunteers, through role-playing and discussion, to help recruit for M-groups so that they feel comfortable describing the groups to others and do it effectively. In talking with potential attendees about M-groups, here is an example of what to say:

[say:] I’d like to invite you to come to an M-group, which is a one-time group that’s really fun and casual, and which focuses on issues important to us as young gay/bisexual men like relationships, community-building, dating, and sex. There will be 8 to 10 other young men there, along with some light snacks and gifts. May I hold a spot for you in next week’s group, which will meet on [day]?

OR

[say:] Have you been to one of our M-groups? (No) Have you heard about them? (No) OK, here’s the deal, we have these one time things where we get 8-10 guys together. They are totally casual and really, really fun. Anyway, we get 8 to 10 guys together and basically talk about sex, dating, relationships, whatever comes up. We usually end up laughing more than anything else. It’s fun, and you get to meet new people and learn about (Project name). It’d be great if you’d come. Would you be available _____?"
When talking with friends, you can add: “Would you come to this group and tell me what you think of it? I respect your opinion and would really appreciate your feedback.”

OR

[say:] “Listen. Keep next Thursday open for me because you are going to our M-group. You’ll have fun and I need your opinion on it. PLEASE??? PRETTY PLEASE??? Thanks.”

A friend may be willing to come to the group out of a personal favor to the person who asked him. He may also attend because he already holds similar values about the importance of gay pride, community building, and practicing safer sex. The Coordinator can also use flattery with his friends, discussing that he really respects their opinions and would like to see what they think about the group. In this case the friends might attend because they know that their friend would truly appreciate feedback about the group.

**Be prepared for rejection**

While personal invitations may be the most effective way to get people to attend M-groups, some men will still not be interested. Being prepared to deal with this sort of rejection is important. No one likes to be told “no,” and when you are, you may feel rejected or put off. One way to prepare for this is by reminding yourself that not every invitation will have a successful immediate outcome. Even if someone declines the invitation now, as the word gets out that the groups are enjoyable and that the Project is trustworthy, the person may choose to attend at a later time. In addition, you might consider inviting these men to other events at the Project space. After seeing the Project in action, some may then be willing to come to an M-group. Remember: every time you have contact with new men—whether on the phone or in person—you are promoting the Project.

**Group composition**

We think M-groups work best if the composition of the participants is as diverse as possible. When scheduling men for groups, consider age, ethnicity (unless your program is only designed for one racial/ethnic group), relationship status, social crowd, etc. This way, participants are exposed to a variety of perspectives, and this enriches the experience for everyone. Likewise, it is valuable to have a few participants who already know and are comfortable with each other. Their presence can help break the ice and contribute to a relaxed atmosphere. However, if all the participants know each other well, they may feel inhibited being honest in the discussions and role-plays. For similar reasons, we recommend against having both partners of a couple in the same M-group. Sometimes, however, young men are reluctant to come to an M-group alone, so if that is the case, encourage them to come with whomever they want. The important thing is that everyone feels comfortable so they will participate fully in the group.
Choosing a time

Be sure to vary the days and times M-groups are offered so that every young man has an opportunity to attend one if he wants to. For example, if M-groups are only scheduled for Wednesday nights, men who have a Wednesday night class or work shift will never be able to attend. As you begin scheduling M-groups, you’ll quickly learn that no matter what day or time you choose, there will always be someone who has a conflict and cannot attend. That’s why we encourage you to rotate the times M-groups are offered so no one is systematically excluded from attending. We have also found that occasionally scheduling M-groups for late Saturday mornings can be effective.

Keeping notes & regular office hours

It is important to keep careful notes about the outcomes of different scheduling methods. We recommend that people recruiting for M-groups record what time of day recruitment phone calls are made and the outcomes of each call, because certain recruitment approaches, days, and times may be more effective than others. *(A sample call log, Figure 9.2., can be found in the Appendix at the end of this Module.)* Then everyone responsible for M-group recruiting can share this information with each other to determine the best days and times to call and to discuss what recruitment methods are most successful. Keeping careful notes enables you to coordinate recruitment efforts and to modify your scheduling style and procedure as you begin to notice which methods, days, and times are most effective.

It is helpful for the M-group Coordinator to hold regular office hours. That way, when the Core Group and other volunteers recruit men to the groups, they can tell them exactly what hours they can call the M-group Coordinator to schedule themselves into a group.

How to schedule

We have found that the following system works well in scheduling men for M-groups:

1. **Accumulate a list of names of potential M-group participants.** This list will include the names of men who have attended various Social Outreach Events, as well as names provided by outreach volunteers and Core Group members. These names are as valuable to your Project as gold. Everyone who uses the list must understand that the names are to be kept confidential. Keep track of when and how often you have called to invite them to attend an M-group, and the reason given, if any, on why the person hasn’t come to an M-group. This can clear up the difference between an interested person whose personal schedule doesn’t quite match the M-group schedule, and someone not interested in attending an M-group who wants you to stop calling.

2. **Personally call each potential participant.** The most effective method is for someone to call each prospective participant, describe the M-group to him, and invite him to sign up for a group. When calling,
don’t forget to remind him that this is a chance to meet other young gay/bisexual men. During the call, be sure to respond to any questions or concerns he may have about attending.

It’s best to develop a protocol regarding how to describe M-groups and the Mpowerment Project and to have rehearsed it. The protocol should also include what to say if you encounter answering machines, voice mail, pagers, roommates, and parents. It is important to know ahead of time how you will handle these situations, since protecting people’s privacy is important. Sometimes leaving a message is the only alternative if you’ve made repeated calls and the person never seems to be home. In such instances, it is important to leave a discreet message. Of course, it is almost always better to have a personal interaction with someone than to rely solely on messages. Of course there’s no way to know for certain if the person ever gets the message intended for him. Some roommates are notorious for deleting messages!

3 Schedule each man for a group that will meet within two weeks of your phone call. Scheduling further ahead than this is rarely effective, given the hectic lives that many people lead, and many men will then forget about the M-group meeting.

4 Immediately send out a confirmation letter as a reminder. It may also be helpful to send a reminder by e-mail, text message, or a post on social networking sites like Myspace or Facebook, but always send out a confirmation letter as well, since not everyone checks e-mail regularly. We have not had much success using e-mails or letters to recruit men to M-groups, but we sometimes fall back on this method after numerous unsuccessful attempts to reach them by phone or in person. (An example of a Reminder Letter, Figure 9.4, can be found in the Appendix at the end of this Module. Figure 9.3 contains a Reminder E-mail.)

5 Call men one or two days before their scheduled M-group to remind them of the date and meeting location. For some men, these reminder calls may be the key to getting them to attend the group. When calling, be enthusiastic and welcoming. Remind the men again that the groups are fun and provide a chance to meet other young gay/bisexual men, and that there will be refreshments and free gifts.

Overbook!

The ideal M-group size is 8 to 10 participants, plus the facilitators. Groups with fewer than 5 participants plus 2 facilitators do not work well. For a variety of reasons, not all of the men who are scheduled to come to a given group will actually show up. We have found that it wise to be prepared for this inevitability by overbooking groups by 30% to 50%. In other words, if you want 9 men to attend, schedule 12 to 18. Despite your best efforts, there will be times when only a few men show up. That’s why it’s also advisable to have Core Group members or friends who can serve as backups if more participants are needed. Know where these people will be the night of the M-group, so that they can be called at a moment’s notice. Sometimes these “back-up” M-group participants can be at the Project space working...
on another volunteer activity (e.g., assembling safer sex kits) during times when an M-group is scheduled, and they can step into the group if they are needed. This will ensure that you never have to cancel a group because there aren’t enough participants. If you do cancel, it’s possible the men who did show up may never return to another M-group.

Keeping records of M-groups

Keeping track of how many men attend M-groups is extremely important for two reasons. First, attendance records serve as documentation that your program is reaching young men and providing them with prevention services. Funders will want to see this data to evaluate whether your program is accomplishing its goals, and this information is very helpful in writing proposals for future funding. Second, it is important to monitor the composition of the M-group participants to make sure they reflect the community’s demographics. For example, are you getting enough 18- to 22-year-olds? Are you only getting white men? Are you on track in terms of reaching your overall attendance goal?

Following each M-group, the facilitators should complete an M-group Planning and Recruitment Form. *(You will find a sample form in Module 12: Evaluation; Figure 12.10).* This form asks about the number and types of men who attended the group, the length of time the group lasted, and general impressions of the group. The M-group Coordinator should compile these forms regularly so he always has a current record of the progress the organization is making with its M-group program.

How to evaluate M-groups

During the final section of the M-group, the facilitators should distribute Participant Satisfaction surveys *(See Module 12: Evaluation, Figure 12.11, for a sample survey form)*, which are completed anonymously by participants before they leave. Feedback from participants about their M-group experiences is invaluable. Their comments on the evaluation forms can be extremely helpful in providing positive encouragement to the facilitators that they are doing a good job and that their efforts are appreciated. Likewise, participants’ comments can provide helpful feedback about aspects of the M-group that could be improved. Facilitators should review these forms carefully following each M-group. The M-group Coordinator should then compile the completed evaluation forms. These statistics can be important in documenting the perceived impact of the M-groups on participants, as well as in charting the quality of the M-group experience over time.
Here is how to estimate the number of young gay/bisexual men in your community.

1. Go to the U.S. Census Bureau website at http://www.census.gov/. We have generally found it most useful to view the information in the 2000 Summary File 1 dataset. To go directly to these detailed tables, use the following address: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=DEC_2000_SF2_U & _lang=en&_ts=40924712556. (Note: these links change from time to time, so if this URL is not working when you try it, navigate to the 2000 Summary File 1 dataset from www.census.gov. You may find it helpful to look for the Census Fact Finder tables.)

If you don’t have Web access from your home or office, many public and university libraries offer free terminals. Another option is to request the information you need directly from the U.S. Census Bureau or from a library.

2. Select your desired place. Begin by determining your desired geographic type (e.g., county, state, place). For this example, we will look at data from the city (or place) of Albuquerque, NM. After selecting PLACE as the geographic type, NEW MEXICO as the state, and ALBUQUERQUE CITY as the geographic area, the website prompts us to ADD Albuquerque to the list at the bottom of the screen. Do this by pressing the ADD button after you have selected Albuquerque City as the desired place.

The online census database allows you to specify states, metropolitan areas, census tracks, counties, or places (cities, towns, villages, etc.). Also, there is abundant evidence that people of color are undercounted by the census. So if you are particularly trying to estimate the number of young gay/bisexual men of color in your area, you should take this into account.

3. Select your desired tables. After choosing Albuquerque City as the desired place, click on the “NEXT” button to see a list of available tables. The census bureau has dozens of tables to choose from (even more detailed tables can be found in the 2000 Summary File 2 dataset), but for our purposes, we are most interested in Table Number 3 "SEX BY AGE." Highlight this table and click the “ADD” button to add it to the list of desired tables. Then click the “SHOW TABLE” button to display information on the number of males of every age.

Simply add up the numbers for your desired age range. This is easy to do by copying and pasting the desired rows into another program such as Excel or Word and using the programs SUM function. By adding up the information on males ages 18-30 in the city of Albuquerque, we can see that there are 44,437 males in this age range.

4. Estimate about how many of these men are gay or bisexual. This is where the guesswork really begins. A 1994 National Opinion Research Center report from the University of Chicago tells us that 4.9% of men have reported a same sex partner since age 18. In addition, 7.7% of men reported an attraction to other men, and considered the prospect of sex with a same-sex partner appealing. But only 2.8% of the men thought of themselves as homosexual or bisexual. However, in the 12 largest U.S. cities, 9.2% of the men described themselves as homosexual or bisexual.* Of course, any study which asks for a self-reported sexual orientation may underestimate the numbers of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals since these labels are still socially undesirable.

Since Albuquerque is not in the 12 largest cities, we will use 2.8% as the low estimate of gay/bisexual men and 7.7% as the high estimate. So, an estimate of the number of gay/bisexual men, ages 18-30, in Albuquerque gives us a range of 1,244 to 3,422. The midpoint of this range gives us an estimate of approximately 2,333 young gay/bisexual men in Albuquerque.

*In 1992, the 12 largest U.S. cities were: New York, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Chicago, IL; Houston, TX; Philadelphia, PA; San Diego, CA; Dallas, TX; Phoenix, AZ; Detroit, MI; San Antonio, TX; San Jose, CA, and Indianapolis, IN.
## Sample M-Group Call Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Phone #</th>
<th>Called By</th>
<th>Call Status</th>
<th>Notes on Call</th>
<th>Scheduled for M-Group</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Reminder Call</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7-27-09</td>
<td>5:45pm</td>
<td>Malik</td>
<td>655-1569</td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Not Home</td>
<td>Lives with mom be discreet</td>
<td>Not yet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8-5-09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-26-09</td>
<td>5:45pm</td>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>567-9585</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>Spoke with Josh</td>
<td>Very interested</td>
<td>8-15-09</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-25-09</td>
<td>8:25pm</td>
<td>Dante</td>
<td>279-2969</td>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not yet</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-27-09</td>
<td>7:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spoke with Dante</td>
<td>May need a ride to group</td>
<td>8-15-09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here is a brief sample e-mail you can send to scheduled participants the day before an M-group. Note it is brief and friendly, and the Coordinator has made an effort to reference how the contact was scheduled, in this case at a large Social Outreach Event. The M-group here was called “Unplugged Sessions.”

Dear ________________:

Thanks for coming to AMPs 3rd Annual LAVA LUAU this last Sunday. Did you have a good time? I love that event. I look forward to all our events, but I really love that one. Anyway, it was good to meet you, and I wanted to check in to remind you about the Unplugged Session this Thursday (tomorrow!) at 7pm here at the AMP House, and to confirm that you’ll be here. Try to get here a few minutes before 7 so we can get situated and start on time. We’ll order some pizza and have soft drinks here and other refreshments. Please let me know if you need directions, or any help getting here. (Directions are also on our website). Sonny and I will both be here, and so will Jonny K, but you’ll also meet some new guys. It’s going to be totally laid back as usual, and I’m glad you’re coming!

So we’ll see you at (just before) 7. If you have any questions, or if for some reason you aren’t able to make it, please give us a call at 512-447-4270.

David

Austin Men’s Project
1215 West Mary Street
Austin, TX 78704
info@austinmensproject.com
www.austinmensproject.com

AMP is young gay, bi, and curious guys coming together to build a strong and supportive community.
Sample M-group Reminder Letter

Here is a sample of a letter you can mail out to guys you’ve scheduled for an M-group in the future. Again, the tone is friendly, upbeat, and enthusiastic about the M-group, here called Unplugged Sessions.

Dear_______________________:

We at the Austin Men’s Project just wanted to send you a letter to remind you that you are scheduled for an Unplugged Session on Thursday, June 27th, at 7pm at the AMP House. Our Unplugged Session is a great way to get to know about AMP, meet new guys in Austin, and discuss many important topics. It’s a one-time deal, and afterward you’ll know a lot more about what AMP has to offer our community. Both Sonny Bono and I (David Sweeney) will be there, and we’ll have refreshments and snacks and some good music. It’s pretty laid back and pretty fun.

The AMP House is located at 1215 West Mary, one block north of East Oltorf, one block east of South Lamar. You can find a map and directions on our website www.austinmensproject.com, and if you have any questions, give us a call at 512-447-4270.

Thanks,

Austin Men’s Project
1215 West Mary Street
Austin, TX 78704
info@austinmensproject.com
www.austinmensproject.com

AMP is young gay, bi and curious guys coming together to build a strong and supportive community.
### Sample M-group Attendance Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>A/PI</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>New</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 White, 1 Latino, five Black, 1 Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cancelled…5 guys cancelled the night of the group. Several men rescheduled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 White, 4 Latino, 3 Black, 3 Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 Latino, 3 Black, 1 Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 White, 4 Latino, 3 Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 White, 3 Latino, 2 Black, 2, Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 White, 2 Latino, 3 Black, 1 Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 White, 4 Latino, 3 Black, 2 Asian/Pacific Islander. 2 guys left after the break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 White, 4 Latino, 2 Black, 3 Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>All new guys. 3 White, 5 Latino, 1 Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cancelled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>3 White, 3 Latino, 2 Black, 2, Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 White, 4 Latino, 2 Black, 2, Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-29</td>
<td>2</td>
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Download this form as a Word document at [www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure9-5.doc](http://www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure9-5.doc)
mPowerment
To explain how to develop and implement a publicity plan that effectively reaches young gay/bisexual men and promotes the Project and its activities.

For the Mpowerment Project to be truly a communitywide HIV prevention program, as many young gay/bisexual men as possible must learn about the Project and its activities. Thus, effective publicity is an important Core Element to help the Project achieve its mission of reducing unsafe sex among young gay/bisexual men in the community.

The most effective publicity campaigns: 1) use multiple strategies, 2) have clear goals, 3) reach all segments of the target audience, 4) are timely and ongoing, and 5) place a Publicity Coordinator or volunteer(s) in charge of implementation. In order to publicize the Project successfully, it is important to select the most appropriate messages to send out and decide how best to convey them. We encourage being as creative and thorough as possible in publicizing the Project. The best suggestions will likely come from the Core Group and other volunteers who are most familiar with their own community.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module

- Figure 10.1 Sample Logo Contest Announcement.
- Figure 10.2 Sample Event Timeline.
- Figure 10.3 Publicity Plan.
- Figure 10.4 Sample Magazine Article written by a Project Coordinator in Dayton, Ohio.
- Figure 10.5 Sample Newspaper Ads.
Mpowerment Project Logos from around the USA
Goals of Publicity

The goals for the Mpowerment Project’s publicity campaign are to:

- Establish an awareness of the Project among young gay/bisexual men (Project promotion)

- Invite young men to become involved with the Project and its activities (Social Outreach Event promotion)

- Inform people who can refer young gay/bisexual men to the Project

- Provide a continual reminder of the norm for safer sex and knowing your HIV status within the young gay/bisexual men’s community (safer sex and HIV testing promotion)

- Convey messages that foster a greater sense of community among young gay/bisexual men (community-building)
Targeting Your Publicity

Define your audience

In Module 2 we discussed conducting a community assessment early in the development of the Project. That assessment should provide a good understanding of the young gay/bisexual men in the community, including:

- where they live
- what they like to do for fun
- where they get their information (publications, radio, TV, Internet, etc.)
- a description of the different groups of young gay/bisexual men
- where they hang out

It should also provide the Project with an overview of the organizations that young gay/bisexual men come in contact with and a picture of the larger diverse gay community. All of these factors are important as the Project determines the best way to publicize the program among:

- the different groups of young gay/bisexual men in the community
- people who come into contact with young gay/bisexual men and can refer them to the Project
- relevant community organizations that serve young gay/bisexual men
- gay community leaders who will support the Project

Ideally, the Project’s publicity efforts will inform every young gay/bisexual man in the community about the Project and what it offers. Hopefully the publicity efforts will also educate every organization that is involved with young gay/bisexual men about the Project and its activities so that they will be able to refer young men to the Project.
Diversify your publicity strategies

We strongly recommend that you diversify publicity methods so that you reach every segment of your community, and so that young men hear the messages about the program multiple times from various sources. If a young man hears from a friend that a fun Social Outreach Event is coming up, and then he sees an announcement for the event on a flyer, and then he reads about it in a gay newspaper or on someone’s Facebook page, he is much more likely to believe that it is worth checking out.

Use diverse methods to publicize your Project: word-of-mouth, online methods, and publicity in written media. Spread the message that something fun and exciting is happening in your community!

Strategies to use to publicize the Project:

- word-of-mouth with friends and acquaintances
- use of social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and other popular community level Internet sites
- use of video sites, such as YouTube
- distributing materials in the community (brochures, flyers, etc.)
- Social Outreach Events and community events
- written “hard” media (news stories, feature articles, announcements, editorials in newspapers)
- advertising
- old fashioned phone calls!
- referrals from local agencies
- networking
- texting or “blasting” a message via text (Twitter and/or bulletin posts on Facebook or MySpace Project accounts)
- sending out messages to men on an Mpowerment Project listserv
- announcements on a website

Using a variety of publicity strategies rather than only one or two methods is also more likely to attract a cross-section of young men that reflect the diversity within the local gay/bisexual men’s community. This relates to the Guiding Principle of diffusion of messages throughout the community. (see Module 1: Overview for more information on the Mpowerment Project’s Guiding Principles.)

For example, conducting outreach and displaying publicity materials in gay bars is an effective way to reach certain groups of young gay/bisexual men.
Don’t advertise the Project through the mainstream community since men who are not fully “out” may be reluctant to participate, and so that the Project doesn’t capture the attention of people who are unsupportive of young gay/bisexual men.

Keep a low profile in the mainstream community

Publicizing the Project can be tricky. On the one hand, it’s helpful if the entire gay and gay-supportive community is informed about the Project. On the other hand, you don’t want to scare off young gay/bisexual men who are not fully “out” or are uncomfortable associating with an organization that is widely known in the mainstream community as serving young gay/bisexual men. For this reason, we do not recommend advertising the Project through the mainstream media, such as the local newspaper or mainstream radio and television stations. Of course this is a decision each community must make for itself, after taking into account such things as the political climate, availability of alternative media, attitudes of the local press, and a Project’s ability to mobilize key allies. In addition, keeping a low profile within the mainstream community helps to avoid capturing the attention of homophobic individuals who may view the Project as “promoting homosexuality” and so attempt to derail or destroy it.
Defining the Project Image

Even though we recommend developing many different types of materials for your Project (e.g., pamphlets, advertisements, flyers, posters) and using a wide variety of images and themes, it is important to create a consistent “look” to your Project’s materials. This is sometimes called “branding” in marketing work. Developing a Project logo is the first step in that process.

Create a Project logo

The Project logo is a graphic representation used to identify the Project on all outreach and publicity materials. A thoughtful, well-designed logo symbolizes the image and qualities associated with the Project. For example, the Mpowerment Project in Eugene, OR selected a logo that was designed by a Project Coordinator during the initial stages of the Project (pictured above, left). At that time, the gay community in Oregon was fighting a very bitter, emotionally charged state referendum to deny basic rights to gays and lesbians. The Eugene Core Group very much liked this logo, as we do, and decided to adopt it because it reflected the strength and power of the young gay/bisexual men’s community that the Project was seeking to build.

MPower in Albuquerque developed their own logo (pictured above, right). Their Core Group liked the boldness and simplicity of this design, which incorporated the symbolism of the sun’s energy and nurturing rays—often depicted in New Mexico by the Zia symbol—and the male symbol. It also invoked the qualities of Native American petroglyph rock paintings and the pop culture look of gay artist Keith Haring.

A second reason to have a logo is that it stimulates questions among those who see it and are curious about it, which then provides opportunities for men to discuss the goals of the Project and to invite other young gay/bisexual men to become involved.

Finally, when many different young men in the community wear items containing the Project logo (t-shirts, hats, lanyards, buttons, and so forth), it
becomes trendy and creates the impression that both it and the Project are popular and well-regarded. This popularity then makes young men more receptive to hearing messages about safer sex and HIV testing, and more interested in building a supportive young gay/bisexual men’s community.

Sharing the logos that Projects around the country have developed with your Core Group and other volunteers working on creating a design may help generate ideas appropriate for your community and Project (see the opening page of this module for a sampling of logos from around the country). Copies of logos can also be found on our website (www.mpowerment.org). When logged in to the “Member Area”, click on “Project Outreach Examples” in the toolbar at the top of the page.

A great logo sparks interest, is easily replicated on many kinds of materials, conveys strength, speaks to the local culture, and does not necessarily cause viewers to say, “that’s a gay logo” or a gay Project.

**Hold a logo design contest**

When a logo was selected in the communities where we implemented the Mpowerment Project, the Core Group held a logo design competition among gay artists in the community. A letter announcing the contest and describing the logo specifications and entry procedures was sent to any artists the Core Group could identify, as well as to local art schools, university art departments, and gay-friendly design firms. *(See Figure 10.1. in the Appendix to this module for a copy of our Logo Design Contest Letter.)* We offered $100 to the winner. We suggest that after entries are submitted to the Project Coordinators, they be posted (without identifying the artists) for viewing in the Project space. The Core Group can then discuss the entries (again without disclosing the identities of the artists) and choose the winning logo.

Ten designs were submitted to the Project in Albuquerque. After a discussion of the pros and cons of each logo candidate, every Core Group member voted for their top two choices. A clear favorite emerged at this point in the process. If one had not, we would have test marketed the top submissions with young gay/bisexual men in the broader community to see what they think. Once the favorite logo was selected, the Core Group met with the artist and discussed some changes it wanted made. After revisions were completed and approved by the Core Group, the artist then produced a computer file of the logo in PDF format for use on all future Project materials.

For Projects beginning this process, it’s helpful to keep in mind that sometimes a logo has to be simplified somewhat so that it reproduces well on materials. Generally logos used on publicity or merchandise are kept small in size, so too many details will tend to get lost or look too “busy.”
Incorporate a tag line and map

Besides placing an appealing logo on all materials, it is also helpful to include with it a “tag line” or phrase that sums up the Project’s mission and/or describes its target group.

The tag line can be selected by the Core Group and volunteers in the same manner as the logo. Some examples of tag lines used by Projects are:

- If we don’t do it, who will?
- Welcome Home
- By and for young gay men.
- The premiere gay/bi men’s social group for [your city/town here]
- Men empowering other men
- Find a friend, a date, a lover.

Many Projects also choose to include a small map with the logo so that young men can find the Project space easily. The look of publicity materials will and should change often so they don’t become boring. They should always be creative and eye-catching, contain appealing images, and include the Project’s logo and contact information.
Developing Publicity Materials

Like nearly all other endeavors in the Mpowerment Project, developing publicity materials is a group effort that should involve as many young gay/bisexual men as possible. Working on materials together helps young men learn new skills, develop a sense of ownership of the Project and the Project’s messages, and feel like they are contributing substantially to the community. The final results will also be better when a number of people have contributed their ideas. Materials developed by and for young gay/bisexual men are an important part of the empowerment process, another of the Project’s Guiding Principles. So, rather than relying on professionally produced materials, the Mpowerment Project uses inexpensive, home-grown materials such as flyers, posters, cards, stickers, magnets, and brochures to publicize the Project in the community.

In order to create high-quality and effective materials, there are some general points that are helpful to keep in mind. The following sections highlight some of these guidelines.

Work as a team to create materials

We have found that there are many talented young men among our Core Groups and Project volunteers who are able to develop materials. It is a good idea to have a materials team comprised of Coordinators, Core Group members, and volunteers who can help design, write, review, and produce publicity materials. Sit down together and begin to determine what sort of publicity is needed for the Project and its upcoming events. Make sure all questions and concerns are addressed early on. Being clear at the beginning saves time and money, prevents misunderstandings and hard feelings, and helps avoid mistakes.
Working as a team to come up with a good-looking publicity piece can be a challenging process. Common sense and courtesy can go a long way to making things work. Rather than saying, “I don’t like this ad” or “This isn’t what we wanted,” it is always more productive to start by sharing what you do like and then making concrete suggestions for ways to improve it, and modeling this for the group so that they also give positive and helpful feedback to whomever is creating the publicity piece. It is important that when the Core Group and volunteers work on and give feedback about materials, the individuals who create the materials are given a great deal of credit for their work, and whenever possible their ideas should be used.

Get feedback early on

Instead of asking volunteers to produce a publicity item on their own and then bring it to the publicity committee for approval, it is preferable for the volunteer or Coordinator to create a draft version of the item and then get feedback on it early in the planning process. The Core Group will only be able to provide such input to if it sees early and intermediate drafts in time. Once that occurs, the material can then proceed to its final version.

Even “final” versions should be approved one last time by the Core Group. While this process is certainly more time consuming than having one person create publicity pieces independently, we have found that the time investment is well worth it. Not only does it empower volunteers as they give input, but it also produces higher quality materials that appeal to a broader range of young gay/bisexual men. We have seen cases where a volunteer brought what he thought was a final version to the Core Group for review and was told that it needed to be changed. Understandably this creates hurt feelings among volunteers. It is much better to get input along the way than to risk hurt feelings and frustration later and alienate volunteers.

Be clear about the review process

The process used to review publicity materials should be explicit from the beginning. The types of questions to ask when putting together a production process and schedule may include the following:

- Who is going to review and approve materials?
- Will all members of the group of reviewers be present at critical phases of material development?
- If not, do they waive the right to review it or should special efforts be made to revise the schedule so they can?
- What is a reasonable period of time to allow people to review a publicity item?
- Does an external program review panel need to review the item as well? If so, what are the procedures and guidelines and how long does the process take?
Have a clear purpose for the publicity piece

While all Mpowerment Project activities contribute to the overall goal of reaching young gay/bisexual men, publicity materials should usually have specific goals or purposes. For example, if the Project is just beginning, it is helpful to create a brochure that lets people know it exists and is open for business. In addition to providing an overview of the Project, the brochure can also briefly describe something about each program or type of activity that the Project offers. Young gay/bisexual men (and people who can refer young men to the Project) should be invited to check out the Project.

On the other hand, suppose the intent is to get the word out about an upcoming Social Outreach Event that the Project is sponsoring and to get young gay/bisexual men excited about it. In this case, the Project would benefit from a flyer to distribute at community venues. Additionally, producing smaller invitations can be helpful so that Core Group members and Project volunteers can distribute them to their friends and other young gay/bisexual men throughout the community. It can also be helpful to develop short text messages that Core Group members and volunteers can forward to friends. Invitations can also be e-mailed, posted to the Project’s social networking page, or posted to a special page on the Project’s website.

Design for your target audience

It is also important to determine who the Project is trying to reach with each piece of publicity. Suppose, for instance, that the event being planned is the official opening of the Project. Who does the Project want to attract to it? It might be important to reach people from several different groups: young gay/bisexual men, other service providers in the community, and potential funders. Or the Project may decide only to target the young gay/bisexual men themselves. Be clear who the target audience is, because this decision will shape a number of key things about the piece, including the messages it contains, the graphics used, its overall “look,” and how it will be distributed (see below).
Use diverse images

Diversity—whether in body type, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational background, or degree of being “out”—can be communicated explicitly and implicitly. Pay attention both to the explicit as well as the implicit messages the Project gives out when using words, images, or photographs. For example, if the Project’s target population is gay/bisexual men of all ethnic/racial groups, be sure to show men of all groups in the photos. But also make sure to show men who are diverse in other ways as well, so they don’t all come across as being college students, trendy dressers, etc.

Keep in mind the Project’s target population when selecting images for publicity materials. If the Project is ethnic-specific (e.g., for young black gay/bisexual men), then having photos of men exclusively of that ethnicity can be used to promote black pride as well as to promote the Project. We strongly recommend using any opportunity to instill pride in the Project’s target population, which is another of the Project’s Guiding Principles.

Match the images to the message

Think about how you want the target audience to respond—both intellectually and emotionally. For example, suppose the text in your publicity piece is about building community and having a safe place to be yourself, and the pictures that are used are of individual buff, shirtless men. While the pictures may be sexy to whoever decided to use them, they may alienate some segments of the audience. First, they may turn off young men who are not into the gym scene, and who may feel threatened by the perceived need to have big muscles or to be athletic. Additionally, while the Project is talking about building community, the photos used depict men alone. Clearly, the images are in conflict with the message of the text. Be sure to match your images to your message.

Plan publicity with the budget in mind

Often the budget will drive the design, so it is important to know your budget from the start. If money is tight, find out what low-cost options are available in your community. For example, ask other nonprofit organizations where they have their printing done. Sometimes members of the Community Advisory Board will have ideas or connections that will help in doing publicity more inexpensively. Occasionally companies (or even government agencies) will donate use of their in-house print shops (or charge greatly reduced rates). In order to take advantage of these lower-cost opportunities, extra time may be needed to complete the job, since it may be run during non-peak hours or less busy periods. Leaving jobs for overnight printing may be cheaper than same-day orders. One-color printing is almost always a cheaper option than more elaborate color schemes. Or consider producing a smaller number of color copies that will be distributed selectively, and distribute black and white copies more broadly throughout the community. Also, smaller printed materials save money because more of them can fit on one page.
For newspaper ads, take advantage of nonprofit discounts and any free ads that are available for publicizing your event such as community calendars or free community service program ads. Sometimes gay and alternative newspapers will also run short news briefs about an event based on a well-written press release submitted by the Project.

When working with the media, be certain to find out about deadlines for submitting various types of material, and also when submitted material is likely to appear in print. Optimally you want to give people enough advance notice so they’ll be able to attend the event, but you also don’t want it too far in advance so that they may forget about it. For larger events you may want to send out a number of calendar announcements or press releases over a period of weeks. It’s also helpful for someone to monitor the media so you’ll know whether your community calendar listing actually got printed in a particular newspaper. If not, it’s worth checking with someone in the media to find out why, and how you can make sure it does the next time around.

Social networking sites offer a free way to distribute flyers electronically. Many Projects upload the jpg or gif image of their event flyer to their sites’ photo albums (Facebook, My Space, etc.). Projects also use the flyer as their site profile picture and use the picture in bulletin posts about the event. This way, all the members (“friends”) of their site see the flyer instantaneously.

Choose an appropriate tone and style

The tone and style used in publicity materials directly affect how people respond. For instance, it may make sense to produce sexy publicity materials when advertising a large Social Outreach Event with a dance party theme for young gay/bisexual men. However, when publicizing a small discussion group on young gay/bisexual men’s religious and spiritual issues, you’ll likely want to use different images. A flyer depicting several couples might be perfect for a forum on boyfriend issues, but in a different context, such as a sporting event, the same images might turn off single guys. So an invitation to a sporting event might more appropriately depict a group of young men playing the sport, or depict a cheerleading squad (if you want to inject a sense of humor into the publicity).

Plan the design and content carefully

Think through the details of the content and design of the piece. When publicizing an event it is critical to include the time, date, location, and a brief but clear explanation of what the event is. We have seen instances where this essential information was inadvertently left out. Also always include the Project’s address, telephone number, website, and MySpace and Facebook URL, if applicable.

In addition Projects typically include their tagline near the Project name in all publicity materials (for example, “by young men, for young men”). This helps convey the nature of the Project for people who may be unfamiliar
with it. By always including this key information, a publicity piece not only advertises the specific event, but it also serves to communicate what the Project is and how to become involved. An effective practice is to post a checklist of all of these essential items next to each of the Project’s computers as a way of reminding the publicity team to include all of them in each publicity piece they produce.

In designing a publicity piece, it will be necessary to decide on the number of colors to use, its size and dimensions, the quantity needed, and how to create materials so that they photocopied or print well. Photographs, for example, may reproduce poorly if the contrast is poor. Also think about how to get the best reproduction quality for your money. Typically it is a Project Coordinator who figures out these kinds of details, and relates them to the publicity team. If the Project Coordinator handling this is inexperienced, he should go to a copy center early on in the planning process to get their advice before completing a design. Seek out Project volunteers who are graphic designers, web designers, and artists; they may also be willing to offer advice.

Consider potential constraints on publicity materials

In creating publicity materials, there may be some constraints—requirements or guidelines—that need to be considered, depending on where you hope to publicize the event. These should be included in the publicity plan. For example, if you want to place a display ad or a calendar announcement in a local weekly gay paper, the publication has size or word number specifications that must be met. If the desire is to distribute materials through local businesses, they may have restrictions on content that are important to know about. For example, a gym owner may be willing to display flyers in his facility, provided they are not sexually explicit, whereas a gay bar owner may not care. In such cases, the solution may be to design two separate flyers, one that is “tamer,” and another that includes more sexually explicit material.

Depending on where your funding comes from, the Project may be required to submit materials to a local Program Review Panel. This constraint can raise some serious problems for your timeline unless plans are made well in advance, since some Program Review Panels only meet infrequently. Furthermore, some review panels may be more restrictive than others in terms of the content of text and images. Be sure to talk to your local or state health department for advice and guidelines on how to proceed.

As stated in Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team, be careful not to waste precious resources on designing materials that are highly unlikely to receive approval—but at the same time, don’t be afraid to push the envelope. We have seen many Projects tone their materials down, but in fact never tested the waters to see if their Program Review Panel might approve some sexier approaches. In fact, many Program Review Panels will approve nearly all materials designed by and for gay/bisexual men because they understand that innovative, eye-catching, and explicit materials are often necessary to effectively prevent HIV and reduce rates of unprotected sex. It may be helpful to meet with the panel to describe
the intent around using different images so that they understand when and why certain images are used. Some agencies have even submitted multiple images for approval all at the same time, so that later on they could just pick from the images that had been approved, thereby eliminating problems associated with untimely turnaround.

### Create a realistic timeline for developing materials

A material development timeline will be a helpful guide in producing each publicity piece from beginning to end. It is very helpful to work backwards from your final deadline to determine how much time is needed for the design and content, feedback, revisions, approval, and production necessary for each publicity piece. Then put together a detailed schedule that allows sufficient time for all of these steps. In general, the earlier the publicity is planned, the better. Know the deadlines for all publications’ advertisements. Saving past versions of ads in electronic format and updating them from event to event may be one way to save time. We also highly recommend building in some extra time to avoid last-minute crises. Nothing is more frustrating than discovering your printer has just run out of ink 15 minutes after all the office supply stores have closed on the day before an important community event. A sample timeline is provided as a guide in developing your own (see Figure 10.2. in the Appendix to this module).

### Develop a publicity plan

Creating a publicity plan as soon as the Project begins can help to guide your long-term planning. An example of a publicity plan from the Austin Men’s Project (condensed for this Module) can be found at right (see Figure 10.3. in the Appendix to this module for a blank publicity plan form). As mentioned previously, Projects typically use a combination of publicity strategies to let people know about the Project or a specific activity.

Essentially, the publicity plan summarizes important information about all the community venues or locations, media outlets (including deadline information), and organizations where you’ll want to post information about the Project and its Social Outreach Events and activities. Additionally, the publicity plan provides a timeline for how often the Project mails information packets to distribution venues in the community, and when it sends out electronic announcements to the e-mail distribution list and posts information on the Project’s Facebook or MySpace pages. It should also list the Project’s action steps to encourage word-of-mouth publicity, including when to send out text messages. A publicity plan is not a static document, but rather changes constantly to reflect the Project’s needs and the current status of the community’s venues, media sources, organizations, and key individuals.

Don’t self-censor your materials: many local Program Review Panels understand that explicit materials are necessary to reduce rates of unprotected sex, and if they don’t, try to educate them about the need.
A publicity plan is not a static document, but rather changes constantly.

## Publicity Plan for Upcoming Social Outreach Event

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<td>The Alternative (alternative weekly newspaper)</td>
<td>Hedi Lamar <a href="mailto:Hedi.Lamar@comcast.com">Hedi.Lamar@comcast.com</a></td>
<td>Weekly/ Two weeks before publication</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ad</td>
<td>The Texonian (university newspaper)</td>
<td>Alex Thomas 412-444-555</td>
<td>Weekly/ Two weeks before publication</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social networking Sites</strong></td>
<td>Ad, upload photos of recent event</td>
<td>Facebook, My Space, Twitter</td>
<td>Myspace.com/mpowermentprojects Facebook.com/pages/mpowermentprojects</td>
<td>2-weeks beforehand, additional reminders 1 or 2 days beforehand</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word of Mouth</strong></td>
<td>small brochures</td>
<td>core group and various team meetings</td>
<td>everyone at these meetings</td>
<td>2-weeks before event</td>
<td>Jonathan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outreach Team to Promote Events</strong></td>
<td>outreach material</td>
<td>The In-Touch (bar)</td>
<td>bar manager: Alberto Rodriguez 412-555-1212</td>
<td>1-week beforehand</td>
<td>Roberto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>same</td>
<td>Martini’s (bar)</td>
<td>bar owner: Jonathan Williams 412-123-4567</td>
<td>1-week beforehand</td>
<td>Roberto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>same</td>
<td>The Stallion (bar)</td>
<td>bar manager: Max Jones 412-123-4567</td>
<td>1-week beforehand</td>
<td>Roberto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>same</td>
<td>Bench and Bar (bar)</td>
<td>bar manager: Paul Newman 412-123-4567</td>
<td>1-week beforehand</td>
<td>Roberto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Announce event on Project website</strong></td>
<td>announcement of event and visuals</td>
<td>Project website</td>
<td>webmaster Lady Gaga <a href="mailto:Lady.Gaga@aol.com">Lady.Gaga@aol.com</a></td>
<td>3-weeks beforehand</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Specific Publicity Strategies

Using print media

While the Mpowerment Project is not typically publicized through the mainstream media, the gay and alternative media may be important allies to your program. College newspapers can also reach a segment of the community’s young gay/bisexual men. They can be vehicles for securing free coverage of Mpowerment Project activities. Cultivate relationships with the media. The Project Coordinators should make it a point to develop relationships with the local alternative and gay media in order to get the type of coverage you need. The Coordinators should talk to them on the phone, send out press releases, and when the time seems right, invite them to visit the Project. (Don't be surprised if the media finds out about the Project and wants to visit before you feel ready to receive them. Should this occur, the Project staff should simply explain that the Project is still in the beginning stages of developing the program. Indicate when a media visit would be welcomed, and that the reporter will be contacted at that time).

Think of newsworthy stories. The press needs news to print; they may also need human interest stories. The Project can help by alerting them to news stories or suggesting topics for feature articles. So, for example, while it may not be desirable for the media to be present at a Social Outreach Event, it might be helpful for them to cover a major event such as the opening of the Project space. Or the Coordinators may just want to walk reporters through their offices to familiarize them with the Project. The Project’s relationship with the press depends in part on how helpful the Project is at providing news—information about something that is timely and often time-limited—and at offering ideas for stories of interest to the paper’s readers.

Frequently it is helpful for the Project staff to write articles themselves. The gay, college, and alternative press sometimes find it challenging to come up with enough news stories for their publications, and only have a small number of reporters (who are usually overworked). Editors of these newspapers frequently appreciate it when Project members offer to write articles for them. (See Figure 10.4. in the Appendix to this module for a copy of a story written by a Coordinator in Dayton, Ohio.) Often, though, they will edit it in some way; you can ask if you can see it again before it goes to print to be sure that the Project is represented accurately. However, not all publications accept articles written by individuals not on staff or allow you to review a story before it goes to press). However, Project staff can certainly “pitch” an idea for an article to a publication’s editor, and provide the information necessary so someone else can write the article.

This approach offers the dual benefits of ensuring that your story makes it into the press, and that the program or the event is described as accurately as possible and in the way you want. For example, we have found that newspapers tend to want to stress the HIV prevention aspects of the Project, rather than the community-building and social aspects of it. Since we know that the Project will reach more men if it is perceived as having the latter emphasis, when publications accept your articles you are more likely to get this message across. For publications that won’t accept your articles, you still
may be able to convey this message if you explain to reporters ahead of time the Project’s rationale for focusing on the social and community-building aspects of the program.

Helping works both ways. It’s always important to keep in mind that while the Project is helping the press by writing articles or generating story ideas for them, they are also helping the Project by publicizing it and its events for free. Here are a few examples of ways that the press can help:

- run articles that introduce the Project to the gay community
- highlight upcoming Social Outreach Events through news briefs and calendar announcements
- provide contact information for the Project
- cover events that have already taken place
- portray the positive contributions of the Project through feature articles

Additional publicity will reap numerous benefits for the Project. It will attract more young gay/bisexual men to participate in the Project. It will bring the Project to the attention of potential Community Advisory Board members. It will also provide “objective” positive reviews of the Project and its activities, which can then be given to potential funders and those who can make referrals to the Project.

Consider including radio stations in the Publicity Plan. First consider if your target population listens to radio, and if so, if they listen to particular stations or programs. This can be something you would ask about during the community assessment. There might be alternative, community or university stations that the population listens to. Young gay/bisexual men of color might listen to particular stations. Broad just trying to focus on any “regular” station might not reach your population and could take more time to set up than its worth.

If you feel that radio might be an effective approach, then it is good to know that under Federal Communications Commission guidelines, radio stations are required to offer some free time to publicize community events. These 10-, 20-, or 30-second radio “spots” are called public service announcements (“PSAs”). Radio can be a very responsive medium where an event can be publicized with a relatively short lead-time. Generally two or three weeks advance notice is sufficient to get the message some air-time. Because radio stations can reach wide audiences, it may not be desirable to use them for feature stories on the Mpowerment Project unless, of course, the story airs on a gay radio program or talk show. However, it may be helpful to make use of the radio station’s weekly calendar of events and get the events announced on the air that way. A Core Group member of the Austin Men’s Project was the host of a gay-themed talk show at the local cooperative radio station. He invited Coordinators and Core Group members to be guests on his show on a regular basis, especially before large Social Outreach Events. This popular show provided an excellent opportunity to publicize the Project and its activities, and it attracted many new young gay/bisexual men to the Project.
Advertising the Project and upcoming events

Buying ad space in gay/alternative newspapers can be an effective tool to reach your target audience. Here are a few points to consider before buying advertising space.

**Determine your target publications**

Carefully consider if advertisements in particular publications will reach young gay/bisexual men. If the papers are not widely distributed or if they are only read by certain small segments of the population, then advertising in them may not be particularly cost effective. Conducting a brief, informal survey of the young gay/bisexual men in the area might be helpful to determine what publications they read if the community assessment did not provide this information. Many papers collect demographic information about their readers that may also be available.

Suppose, for example, only white men over 30 read the local gay paper. If so, the publicity plan needs to be diversified. In some communities, gay papers are predominantly distributed in bars, and may miss younger men. In these instances, an alternative paper such as a local free press or a university newspaper may be a better choice. We want to inject a word of caution, however. We have observed the situation where Coordinators state that, “no one under the age of 30 reads that newspaper,” or “no young Black (or Latino) men read that paper”—and once advertisements were placed in it, indeed many young men in the target group did read the paper. Here, as in other cases, it is important that the Coordinators do not make decisions merely based on their own perceptions of a situation.

It is also important to consider if print media should be used at all. Newspapers are going out of business, and many alternative and/or gay newspapers are folding. People aren’t reading magazines as much. So find out from young men that they are reading newspapers or magazines before spending the money to buy any ads.

**Place ads where they’ll be seen**

The ads the Project purchases (or which are donated) must be seen by the young men the Project is trying to reach. Simply buying the space is not enough. It is usually preferable to specify the exact pages and location (if possible) where you’d like the ads to run. An expensive display ad may be less effective than an inexpensive ad in the personals section (e.g., “Men seeking Men” section, or something similar) if young gay/bisexual men do not read the pages where the display ads run. Again, asking the Core Group and other young gay/bisexual men can help make more informed decisions about ad placement. Particularly in the beginning, trial and error may occur before learning what works best. Try placing ads of different sizes and in a variety of locations. Then note if there seems to be any change in the number of phone calls that are received about the Project or the number of men who show up at events.
Flyers and ads can also be embedded on social networking sites. Use as many social networking sites as possible to get the word out about your Project and its activities. Encourage Core Group members and other participants to embed flyer images on their personal pages as a way to get the word out about an upcoming event or even more generally, about the Project itself. Both Facebook and MySpace offer ways of inviting ‘friends’ to events. Projects can ‘create an event’ and upload an event flyer and give details about time and location and Project contact information. Once the invite is sent, members can let the Project know if they ‘will be attending’, ‘maybe’ or ‘no, not attending’ by clicking a button. If someone selects that they will be attending, then their online friends are alerted to the news that their friend will be attending a Projects event.

Other Internet sites and approaches can also be used. For example, some Projects have experienced success at placing advertisements on the “Men seeking men” part of Craig’s List. Encouraging guys to text their friends about upcoming events, or at least reminding them about the events, can be helpful.

**Emphasize the Project’s or activity’s benefits**
The most effective ads do not just describe the Project, but instead, try to sell it to young gay/bisexual men by highlighting the benefits of becoming involved with the Project or attending an event. For example, an ad that describes the M-groups but says nothing else is likely to be less successful than one which states that by attending a group, young men can meet new friends, find community, feel better about themselves, or improve their relationships.

**Create a consistent look**
As described previously, it is helpful to create a consistent look for all the Project materials, including for the advertisements. This is the Project’s “brand.” In particular, the ads should have the Project tagline, logo, phone number, address, and URL of the Project’s website. And the ad should be eye-catching and interesting.

**Create materials that reflect the target population**
Perhaps most importantly, it is vital that young gay/bisexual men can see themselves in materials that the Project produces. If the publicity team decides to use photos of people in the publicity campaigns, it is essential that the photos reflect the full spectrum of young gay/bisexual men in the community. Men come in all colors, sizes, and shapes. Ads that do not reflect this reality will present a monolithic image to the community, and may alienate some segments of young gay/bisexual men. This can be a tricky issue, however. While some men may decry the use of images that portray only very attractive men, creating eye-catching materials will definitely attract the attention of young gay/bisexual men.

At least for some ads, it is helpful to use images of men who are part of the Project. Digital cameras are not that expensive these days, and nothing reflects the community as well as photos of the young men who are already a
part of Project. Consider what to do, however, if you want to reach a diverse group of young men—but your Project isn’t yet reaching this diversity. If this is the case, it may not be quite ready to do a photo shoot of your own guys until you bring in more diversity.

The Austin Men’s Project used gay, campus, and alternative papers in a variety of ways. For example, every week, Project Coordinators sent an e-mail to their contacts who produced the free community listings or calendar sections of the papers. They also cultivated relationships with local columnists and encouraged them to cover and publicize upcoming events. Project Coordinators and volunteers successfully negotiated free or reduced rates for display ads to publicize large Social Outreach Events and other Project activities. The Project decided not to spend large amounts of money on display ads because they realized that the free community listings and calendars were more effective in attracting participants to their activities. However, one advertising strategy that was highly successful was rotating a series of six amusing print ads on the back page of the local free press every week. (See Figure 10.5. in the Appendix to this module for examples of print ads.)

**Posting materials**

Create a comprehensive list of all the physical or virtual places where materials should be distributed, including flyers, brochures, posters, event calendars, stickers, and event invitations. A monthly listing of these places should be developed, with check-off lists to indicate that materials have been brought or sent to, or placed at these sites. Some places to consider include:

- gay bars
- coffeehouses
- record stores
- gay/alternative/adult book stores
- gyms and health clubs
- gay student unions and bulletin boards on a college or university campus
- HIV/STD testing clinics
- gay counseling centers
- alternative and Internet cafes
- laundromats in neighborhoods known to be frequented by young gay/bisexual men
- ice cream shops
- social networking sites including Facebook and MySpace
- other websites & chatrooms (to place electronic versions of flyers)

Of course wherever materials are distributed, make sure they are appropriate to the location so that the men who pick them up will feel comfortable reading them there.
We’ve seen Projects successfully get the word out by posting publicity materials at various locations on the first day of the month (or as soon as the monthly calendar is ready) and then supplementing those materials with event specific materials as soon as they are produced. Whenever possible, it is preferable for the Project Coordinators or volunteers to display or post the materials instead of relying on the staff of each venue to do it. The employees are often quite busy with their regular job duties and frequently don’t get around to putting up the materials, or place them in a spot where they are not easily seen.

**Social networking and internet outreach**

Virtual communities and online social networking sites are currently one of the most engaging components of an ongoing publicity campaign; many Projects around the country have had a great deal of success integrating these sites into their publicity campaigns. There are many compelling reasons for Mpowerment Projects to be visible on these sites, including the following:

- **Social networking sites are an established communication medium, tapping into large networks of young gay men in most communities.**
- **They are free, easy to use, and allow Projects to have control over their online content.**
- **They are easy to maintain and can be updated instantaneously, communicating promotional messages to large networks of young men immediately.**

A majority of Mpowerment Projects are using social networking sites to promote themselves. Many young people spend large amounts of time involved with their peers in these virtual communities. Since the sites and these technologies are ever-evolving, it is important that Project Coordinators keep current on the latest sites and technologies that young men are using to communicate with one another. Keep in mind that what may be a popular social networking site today can quickly be replaced by an even more popular site tomorrow.

Many young men maintain a profile on a social networking site. They use these sites to keep in touch with friends, give short and quick status updates, e-mail messages to each other, and upload their photos. In the same way, Projects can use social networking sites to establish a presence for online community-building. Since most sites are easy to navigate, Project staff can easily create and maintain a Project profile or fan page. Once you gather participants’ e-mail accounts (see Figure 5.2 in Module 5: Core Group for examples of interest sheets), staff can use the social networking site to invite them to become a “friend” or “fan” of their Project.

These social networking sites align themselves with many of the Guiding Principles of the Mpowerment model. They encourage positive influence and support between young men online. In addition, they help to expand supportive networks of young men in their area, and they affirm community-building
principles by inviting young men to attend the Core Group and other events.

We briefly describe each site below. Tutorials for each can be found at their specific websites by going to www.google.com and entering, for example, “Facebook tutorial.” The same can be done for the other social networking sites.

**General recommendations**

Here are some ideas for information that can be posted on sites:

- a description of the Project
- a calendar of upcoming events
- pictures of Project staff and volunteers (with their permission, of course)
- pictures of recent large and weekly events, themed outreach events, and the Project space
- online photo albums of past events and performances.
- embedding Project-made videos and presentations (one Project attributes their online video (which asked for music requests) to revitalizing their membership)
- a list of volunteer opportunities
- contact information (e.g., e-mail address and phone numbers) for more information about the Project and its activities
- safer sex information
- links to HIV testing sites and other information on AIDS and STDs
- links to a variety of support and informational services

Many Projects we talked to not only maintain an email list of interested men, but an ever-growing cache of “friends” on their social networking pages. These men can be sent weekly updates containing news and announcements of upcoming events. *(See Figure 7.3. in the Appendix to Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team for examples of weekly updates from Albuquerque, NM and Austin, TX.)*

Social networking and other Internet sites that we will discuss include:

- Facebook
- MySpace
- Twitter
- YouTube

If your Project decides to host a website, Facebook, or MySpace site, please keep them current. We’ve seen some Project sites go without updates for a month or more. Not only will this diminish your online presence, but young men who seek out your Project online will become bored, or worse, feel
Facebook is currently the king of social networking sites in the United States. To participate in Facebook, each new user must create a personal Facebook Profile. Facebook users may then choose to join one or more networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region. These networks help users connect with other members of the same network. Users can also connect with friends, giving them access to their friends’ profiles. The website is free to users.

**Facebook Groups**

Facebook allows members to create a group that other users can join. Groups are used for discussions and to post upcoming events. Groups are a way of enabling a number of people to come together online to share information and discuss specific subjects. There are also a number of privacy controls that a group can use. For example, it can be an open group, where everyone on Facebook can join. There is also the option of having a closed group where joining is by invitation only.

Facebook groups can be used by Mpowerment Projects to interact with men interested in Project news and upcoming events. A group is comprised of the following: the members who have joined, recent news, a discussion board, a wall for posting brief messages, photos, videos, and associated comments related to each of these sections.

**Facebook Pages**

Another option is to host a Facebook Page. A Facebook Page is different from a Facebook Profile. Hosting a Page has advantages over Groups and Profiles. One advantage is that a Page is not associated with any one individual. In a Facebook Group the person who created the group is listed as such, while a Facebook Page creator is anonymous. This can be important in case a Coordinator leaves, as the hosting duties can be seamlessly transferred to another Coordinator.

Owners of a Page can send updates to their Fans. Also, when Fans interact with a Page, stories linking to the Page are then sent to their friends via News Feed. As these users click through and interact with your Page, News Feed keeps spreading the messages word-of-mouth to a wider circle of friends.

Owners also have access to insights and analytic tools about their Fan base including: the number of unique Page views per day, how many new Fans have joined over time, and how many photos have been viewed. One of the most popular applications on Facebook is the Photos application. While you can upload pictures to a Facebook Group, Facebook Pages allow users to upload an unlimited number of photos to photo albums. Additionally Pages allow the use of albums. For example, photos can be divided into photo albums of Core Group meetings, an album showcasing the Project space, and albums of recent themed outreach events. This can give group members a sense of what they can expect when they attend events.
Another feature of the Photos applications is the ability to “tag” or label users in a photo. For instance, if a photo contains a user’s friend, then the user can tag the friend in the photo. This sends a notification to the friend that they have been tagged, and provides them a link to see the photo.

**Facebook Events**
Both Facebook Groups and Facebook Pages can create an event. Facebook events are a way for members to let friends know about upcoming events in their community and to organize social gatherings. Events require a name, network, host name, event type, start and end time, and location. The Group members or Pages fans become the guest list of friends who are invited. Events can be open or closed. When setting up an event the user can choose to allow friends to upload photos, videos, and other items. Members of a group can then RSVP to the event online by clicking on three options: Attending, Maybe Attending, or Not Attending. This can give a Project a general estimate of how many to expect. This feature also lets other members know who will be and will not be attending.

MPower OC in Orange County, California used a Facebook event to promote “Snowball—A Free Gay Snow Trip.” Here is how their event read to members of their Facebook group:

---

**Host:** Mpower OC (Orange County's Premiere Gay Men's Social Group)
**Type:** Trips – Daytrip
**Network:** Global
**Date:** Sunday, March 1, 2009-03-02
**Time:** 8:00am – 6:30pm
**Location:** Mpower Warehouse
**Street:** 1234 Harbor Blvd.
**City/Town:** Bankrupt, CA
**Phone:** 123-456-7890

**Description**
Join the OC's Premiere Gay/Bi men's Social Group for a FREE day @ the Snow. We include everything!!! Transportation, food, tubing park admission, inner tube rentals, and a scenic lift ride. Space is limited to the first 50 people that RSVP and sign up. To RSVP and sign up for this event attendees must contact Anthony @ 123-456-7890. Sign-ups will be held @ the Mpower Warehouse during normal operating hours until Thursday, February 26th.

For all interested persons in our upcoming snow trip, the following are a few reminders about this event:

-- This is for 18-29-year-old gay/bi men ONLY.
-- You must come to the Mpower warehouse to RSVP and complete event waiver
-- Cut off to RSVP for the event will be Thurs., Feb. 26th, or earlier, based on popularity of the event.
-- Space is limited to the first 50 people that sign the waiver.
  (Please realize that this is first come, first served.)
-- No personal snow equipment is required or ALLOWED.
  (All equipment for the event activities will be provided.)
-- A list of recommended attire and personal items will be provided during the RSVP process.


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Mpowerment Olympia in Washington state used a Facebook event to promote a unique skating experience called the “Friends of Dorothy Skate.” This is how their Facebook event read:

**Event Info:** Friends of Dorothy Skate

- **Host:** Mpowerment Olympia
- **Type:** Party
- **Network:** Global
- **Date:** Saturday, February 28, 2009
- **Time:** 5:00pm – 9:00pm
- **Location:** Skateland
- **Street:** 2275 12th Ave.
- **Town:** Olympia, WA
- **Phone:** 123-456-4789
- **Email:** olympiamensproject@gmail.com

**Description:**
Follow the yellow brick road somewhere over the Rainbow to Skateland and skate with Dorothy and her fabulous queer friends!! Roller Skate above the chimney tops, where bluebirds fly and where the tin man and the scarecrow are lovers. Discover the Land of Oz in Olympia where the dreams you dare to dream really do come true!

Arrive in your favorite Oz character costume or any other costume you feel like wearing. Although costumes are not required, they’re always encouraged.

Saturday February 28, 2009
From 5:00pm-7:00pm!!!
$1.50 admission (includes roller skate skates) / $4.00 for roller blades

MySpace is a social networking website with an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music, and videos. One significant difference between Facebook and MySpace is the level of customization. MySpace allows users to decorate their profiles using HyperText Markup Language (HTML) and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), while Facebook only allows plain text. This allows Projects to add and customize design elements such as photos, graphics, colors, and fonts. Once a Project creates a profile page, they can invite other profiles to become “friends.”

An important feature of Myspace is the ability to browse profiles. Using advanced browsing features a Project can seek out men by age range, city and orientation (both gay and bisexual). Once a browse is performed the men found can be invited to be a ‘friend’ of your Project. Not only do they become aware of a Project in their area, it also increases your Projects friends list.
Here is a list of some Mpowerment Projects currently using MySpace.

By glancing at a few of these sites, you will quickly get ideas of what to put on your site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>MySpace URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INMIX!</td>
<td>Spokane, WA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/lilaccitymensproject">www.myspace.com/lilaccitymensproject</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.E.C. Boyz</td>
<td>Detroit, MI</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/detrecboyz">www.myspace.com/detrecboyz</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegas Mpowerment Project</td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/vegasmpowerment">www.myspace.com/vegasmpowerment</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami Mpowerment</td>
<td>Miami, FL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/mpowerment105">www.myspace.com/mpowerment105</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>EP Outings</td>
<td>El Paso, TX</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/elpasoutings">www.myspace.com/elpasoutings</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ache</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/ache_elproyecto">www.myspace.com/ache_elproyecto</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpowerment Projects</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, UCSF</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/mpowermentprojects">www.myspace.com/mpowermentprojects</a></td>
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<td>MPower</td>
<td>Albuquerque, NM</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/abqmpower">www.myspace.com/abqmpower</a></td>
</tr>
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<td>M power</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/mpowersd">www.myspace.com/mpowersd</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEARs</td>
<td>Pensacola, FL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/thegearscenter">www.myspace.com/thegearscenter</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis Project</td>
<td>Pocatello, ID</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/genesis_project">www.myspace.com/genesis_project</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project(!)</td>
<td>Kalamazoo, MI</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/swmproject">www.myspace.com/swmproject</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpowerment</td>
<td>Champaign, IL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/mpowercu">www.myspace.com/mpowercu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/qaustin">www.myspace.com/qaustin</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpowerment Bakersfield</td>
<td>Bakersfield, CA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/mpowerment1">www.myspace.com/mpowerment1</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOCHA Project</td>
<td>Buffalo, NY</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/mochabuffalo">www.myspace.com/mochabuffalo</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUSION</td>
<td>Wilton Manors, FL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/fusionwiltonmanors">www.myspace.com/fusionwiltonmanors</a></td>
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<td>Euphoria</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/mpowersandiego">www.myspace.com/mpowersandiego</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In The Mix</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/inthemixsd">www.myspace.com/inthemixsd</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.L.A.M.</td>
<td>Burlington, VT</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/mpowervt">www.myspace.com/mpowervt</a></td>
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<td>Mpowerment</td>
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<td>Mpowerment Philly</td>
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<tr>
<td>B More Mpowerment</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
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</tr>
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<td>NYA Boys Mpowerment</td>
<td>Oakland, CA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myspace.com/nyaboy09">www.myspace.com/nyaboy09</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
MySpace Bulletins
Bulletins are messages that are posted to a “bulletin board” and that can be viewed by everyone on a MySpace user’s friends list. Bulletins can be useful for contacting everyone on a friends list without resorting to messaging users individually. Projects use bulletins to advertise upcoming events. Bulletins are automatically deleted after ten days.

Here are a few examples of MySpace bulletins used by Projects.

MySpace Bulletin, Example 1

From: M Cube, St. Louis, MO
Subject: This week at M Cube
The Core -
We got a lot of great plans made last night. Thanks to all who attended, both new faces and veterans!
TNC - (Tuesday Night Crew)
TONIGHT, Tuesday, 6:30pm to 10:30pm at The Spot (4444 Laclede Ave, 1st floor). Ages 13-24. TNC is a weekly gathering of black gay and bi young men and their friends. This group is dedicated to community-building and healthy sexual development for all its participants. Dinner and soft drinks provided. First timers welcome—just show up.
FIERCE: Knockin’ Pins -
Thursday, 7:30pm to 9:30pm at Tropicana Lanes. Ages 18-29. Meet up with the guys for a night of bowling! Admission is on us but please RSVP for this event by contacting A.J. or Danny at 123-456-7894 or MCubed@gmail.com. Tropicana Lanes is located at 45 Manly Rd (63117).
See the attached flyer by Drew Dinges because it’s uber cute!

MySpace Bulletin, Example 2

From: Project Ache, Puerto Rico
Subject: Atención HOMBRES del OESTE
Las oficinas de Ache del Oeste ya están buscando contactos para comenzar a dar servicios. Todos los Hombres que estén en el área de Mayaguez y zona Oeste por favor déjennos su info de contacto por este medio o al email adoldcg@gmail.com. Su número de teléfono o email será usado de manera totalmente confidencial para dejarles saber de los servicios y futuras actividades. Por favor aclarar en el email si debemos comunicarnos con ustedes de una manera discreta (emails o teléfonos compartidos) para su comodidad y facilitarnos así el trabajo. Cuidense, los esperamos.
Horario de Aché del Oeste: Por ahora de 10:00 am a 6:00 pm. El horario se revisará cuando se comiencen los servicios.
Teléfonos: 123-456-7894
Correos electrónicos: Luis Daniel Cruz González Coordinador uvuvu@gmail.com
Abdiel Echevarria Cabán tsghy@gmail.com
Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that allows users to send and read other users’ updates, known as tweets. These are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length. Updates are displayed on the user’s profile page and delivered to other users who have signed up to receive them. These updates are sent to members’ cell phones, iPhones, and Facebook accounts. This means that a large number of participants can be contacted at once very quickly. Normal text charges do apply for messages. Some young men will have unlimited texting capabilities, while others may be on a limited phone-texting plan, so it’s best that members sign themselves up for the free Twitter online service if they prefer not to incur cell phone charges. It’s also a good idea to think when and how often messages will be sent out by the Project. You might start off slowly with one or two messages a week and see what the response is.

Here are some sample tweets that we imagine Projects could use.

**Promotional Tweets can advertise Project events:**

**Volunteer Tweets can remind members and volunteers about upcoming volunteer opportunities:**

YouTube is a video sharing website where users can upload, view, and share video clips. YouTube offers technology to display a wide variety of Project-generated video content, including movie clips, keynote presentations, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos.

Once the video is uploaded, the site produces a URL link to the video as well as the ability to “embed” the content on Project social networking sites and websites using HTML. Unregistered users can watch the videos, while registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos. Accounts of registered users are called “channels.”

Projects can interview Coordinators and participants and have them share what the Project means to them. Projects can also take video of their last large event or themed outreach, creating a video scrapbook of events.

The Mu Crew in Dayton, Ohio made a video showcasing a recent Outreach
Team performance held at a local bar. It offered a slick, well-choreographed dance performance with men in their Crew t-shirts dancing and singing. It was high-energy, uplifting, and was a lot of fun for all the participants involved. Once a film like this is posted, members of the Outreach Team will want to show off their performances to their friends.

**Word-of-Mouth**

Word of mouth is certainly the least expensive and most productive means of publicizing the Mpowerment Project. Finding ways to encourage Core Group members, volunteers, and other young gay/bisexual men in the community to talk about the Project and its upcoming events is one key to the publicity plan’s success. We suggest bringing up this topic at every Core Group meeting, to remind and motivate members to chat about the Project with their friends and acquaintances by posting reminders of upcoming events using their individual social networking sites. Regardless of how many times a young man sees a Project’s website, event listings on Facebook or MySpace pages, or a flyer in the community, a word-of-mouth invitation is almost always the most important reason a young man attends a Project activity for the first time.

It may also be helpful to designate specific nights, meetings, or events as “bring-a- friend” activities. Additionally, once the Project develops promotional materials such as t-shirts, hats, lanyards, buttons, etc., encourage Project participants to wear them as much as possible. These serve as “walking billboards” for the Project and help convey the image that it is a popular, dynamic force in the community. Ideally, wearing these accessories may also trigger inquiries and conversations about the Project with people who see men wearing them.

**Event and Project Promotion at Community Events**

Community events can provide great opportunities to promote the Mpowerment Project. Various Projects have participated in gay-themed events including local gay pride festivals, coming out days, and gay pride parades, and staffed booths at gay pride festivals. Sometimes at these events the Project can set up a booth about its activities, and distribute promotional materials. Special promotional materials can be developed in keeping with the theme of the event. But in addition, some fun, creative approaches can be used to draw attention to the Project.

For example, the Men’s Program in Brattleboro, VT had a “Men Seeking Handstands” event in a public square when a farmer’s market was taking place. Members of the community were encouraged to do a handstand in honor of the gay/bisexual men in their lives. About 70 handstands were done in an afternoon, including some by mothers, brothers, sisters, and fathers. Pictures were taken of and given to each person who performed a handstand. It was a creative way to draw attention to the Project as well as to generate good will in the community for all the gay “brothers” in their midst.

**Event and Project Promotion Outreach**

As discussed in Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Team, the Outreach Team can also conduct fun, engaging, and
interactive performances at bars and other community venues and events to publicize each large Social Outreach Event. Sometimes the costumes are just fun in and of themselves (for example, when promoting the Project). At other times the costumes relate to the theme of an upcoming event. Some Project Coordinators shy away from conducting themed outreach, in which men go to bars and community locations wearing costumes around a theme. However, we have observed that in many Projects, after the Coordinators tried it themselves, they found that costumed outreach was an effective recruitment tool.

For example, the Coordinator of the Guateke Project in San Juan, Puerto Rico felt that they were losing steam with their Project outreach. As a consequence, they were finding it difficult to recruit enough men for M-groups since too few new men were attending the Project. They had been relying on conducting outreach at the bars by wearing jeans and a t-shirt with the Project logo, but they were starting to feel a little stagnant. So the Coordinator held a couple of pep talks with the Core Group. He believed that themed outreach was the best hope for getting the word out, reinvigorating the group, and meeting their M-group recruitment goals. As an experiment, he convinced them to conduct an outreach event dressed in a camouflage costume, with the understanding that afterward they would reflect on the response from bar patrons and the effect it had on recruitment to M-groups. Core Group members found, to their surprise, that they were well received by the bar patrons and were able to more easily recruit for M-groups and meet their programmatic objectives. From that point on, they strove to create new and interesting visual themes for their outreach because they truly believed that it worked.

Projects that are successful at themed outreach usually have an engaged and outgoing Outreach Coordinator who makes it "safe" for other volunteers to become more outgoing. They also seek out and mentor young men who are more theatrical, like to attract attention, and are flamboyant. The most successful themed outreaches play on sexy and erotic themes.

The Outreach Team can also conduct fun, engaging, and interactive performances at bars and other community events to promote the Project.
Here are examples of some successful themed outreach events:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project/Location</th>
<th>Themed Event</th>
<th>Bar Zap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACHE, Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Sexy Cowboys</td>
<td>Men wore cowboy hats, bandanas, flannel shirts, jeans with holes, lassos, and cowboy boots. Safer sex messages referenced Brokeback Mountain and other cowboy folklore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin Men's Project,</td>
<td>Futurama: the Future of Safer</td>
<td>Time travelers came back in time to share the future of safer sex. The team had futuristic silver clothing, spiked hair, and everything neon and “glow-in-the-dark” including ray guns and body paint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austin Men's Project,</td>
<td>Bedazzled Armed Forces</td>
<td>Promoting a large military themed event “Basic Training”—members went to an army supply store and bedazzled everything they bought—they military fatigues and added glitter! They were the refashioned army of love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin Men's Project,</td>
<td>Camp Counselors</td>
<td>Promoted a large event: CAMP AMP, which was a picnic in a park full of camp activities. Members wore khaki shorts, bandanas, whistles, and a counselor hat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM Project, Lafayette, LA</td>
<td>Playful Bunnies</td>
<td>Men wore pastel colored t-shirts, bunny ears, bow-ties, and little bunny tails. They distributed plastic Easter eggs by basket, each containing condoms and lube, a Project invite, and safer sex messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM Project, Lafayette, LA</td>
<td>Fairies</td>
<td>Members dressed in feathered wings, red minishorts, and body paint. They passed out mini-blow bubbles and blow pops with fun messages that promoted safer sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPower Albuquerque, NM</td>
<td>Hot Firemen</td>
<td>Volunteers borrowed actual firemen clothing and equipment. They conducted a safer sex safety drill with everyone in the bar. Safer sex packets included redhots and red-hot jawbreakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPower, Albuquerque, NM</td>
<td>Sexy Sailors</td>
<td>Men wore white sailor caps with blue scarves, white t-shirts, and dark jeans. Guys handed out messages with safer sex jargon that referenced sailor and military culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPower OC, Orange County,</td>
<td>Greek and Roman Mythology of</td>
<td>Men dressed as Roman soldiers, and a slew of mythological characters including Apollo, Aries, Mercury, and Athena. Roman guards and centurions were also in attendance. The float was decorated as a simple Greek temple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Safer Sex—Pride festival float</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPower, Albuquerque, NM</td>
<td>Baseball players</td>
<td>Men wore jerseys, cleats, baseball caps, and baseball bats. They talked with baseball jargon, and the safer sex messages were full of baseball references. Everybody made it to third base.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPower OC, Orange County,</td>
<td>Condomaniacs</td>
<td>Each Outreach Team member dressed as a different condom to promote safer sex. “Sheik” dressed as an Arabian, “Ramses” in an Egyptian costume, “Crown” as a King, etc. Each condom man went around the bar asking patrons to identify which condom he represented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>“Power of Prevention” Large event promotion.</td>
<td>Promoting the large event “Power of Prevention,” members dressed as popular super heroes including Wonder Woman, Batman, Robin, Spiderman, Wolverine, Posion Ivy, Catwoman, the Flash, Silver Surfer, and Harlequin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride Mission, Santa</td>
<td>Mailmen</td>
<td>USPS outreach. Members dressed as mailmen and delivered safer sex letters to patrons. They also made sure everyone’s “package” was safe that night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara, CA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The telephone

As simple as it seems, the telephone is a critical tool for communicating with your target audiences. More mileage can be gotten out of it by adding an answering machine or voice mail so callers can leave messages. One advantage of the telephone is that it is available to everyone.

We encourage agencies to dedicate a phone line to their Mpowerment Projects, especially if the Project is housed in an agency space. Young men will be turned off by a Project if they have to go through an agency operator who answers the phone, “Thank you for calling AIDS Services, may we help you?” A Project that has its own phone number is likely to be viewed as an independent Project and not associated as an HIV/AIDS service provider.

Consider creating a versatile voice mail system with multiple mailboxes that can provide announcements about upcoming activities, take messages, and allow callers to leave messages for specific staff members (both Coordinators and key volunteers).

Record greetings that are clear, friendly, and inviting. One example of a telephone greeting appears below. For many men, their first contact with the Project may be when they hear the greeting on the answering machine or voice mail system. Whether the Project makes a good first impression or not often depends on it. We suggest asking several people to listen to the greeting and provide feedback. Does it inspire a caller to leave their phone number (a big risk for some) or to call back at another time? Saying that phone calls will be returned discreetly sometimes also helps. Here is a sample telephone greeting from The Austin Men’s Project:

“Hello, and thank you for calling the Austin Men’s Project. AMP is young gay/bi and curious guys working together to build a strong and supportive community. If you would like to leave a message for David Sweeney, Outreach Coordinator, press one now. If you would like to leave a message for John Carter, Events Coordinator, press two now. If you would like to hear more about upcoming events, press three. All return calls will be made discreetly.”

Referrals

During your community assessment (see Module 2: Community Assessment), be sure to ask young gay/bisexual men where they receive services and where they go to socialize and meet other young gay/bisexual men. These organizations may serve many men from your target population. In fact, they may also employ potential participants or have them in their volunteer base. Either way, they are crucial vehicles for getting the word out about the Mpowerment Project. In doing so, they can help attract young gay/bisexual men to events and interest them in becoming more involved as Community Advisory Board members, staff, or volunteers.

We recommend that that all community organizations that have contact with young gay/bisexual men be informed about the Mpowerment Project and provide them with the information they need to refer young men to the Project. Ask them to add the Mpowerment Project to their referral
lists and make Project materials available in their offices. In addition, Mpowerment Project staff can maintain an up-to-date list of agencies that Project participants may wish to contact. Solid linkages to other relevant organizations can be made when Project Coordinators personally meet with their leaders to describe the Project in detail. Referrals should go in both directions: from the Mpowerment Project to local community agencies, and from the agencies to the Project.

Make special efforts to gain the support of relevant agencies, since these can increase the likelihood of receiving referrals from them. For example, if many men receive HIV testing from the local health department, then a good first step is to make sure the clinic has Project flyers, brochures, and announcements for upcoming Project events. We recommend that you have a system in place to replenish their supply of publicity materials. Organizations often forget to request more materials when they run out. A second step might be trying to conduct an in-service session with the staff and volunteers of these agencies. That way, they can put a face and name to your Project. This can increase the likelihood that they will remember to distribute your materials to clients when appropriate, and to display them in waiting areas. Introductory letters and follow-up phone calls to these agencies can be remarkably effective. Most service providers will want to know whether an organization provides services that are of high quality, free or affordable, culturally appropriate, and confidential. Only then are they likely to refer potential participants to your Project, and to do so in a way that increases the likelihood they will actually contact the Project.

The Austin Men’s Project compiled a list of supportive community agencies and mental health professionals and mailed them packets containing their monthly calendar and current promotional materials. The benefit of mailing these materials is that time didn’t need to be spent bringing them to a venue. However, it may be important to visit the space occasionally and see if these materials were hung up. If not, ask why.
Networking

Networking simply means talking to people about the Mpowerment Project and getting leads on whom else you should contact. It is a particularly important method for reaching potential Community Advisory Board members and for gaining access to funders to present your case. As you network, develop a list of contacts with their addresses and phone numbers, the potential role they might play in the Mpowerment Project, and any other relevant information. Talk to people you meet socially as well as those you make contact with in establishing a referral system. Having a strong network of support for the Project will help ensure its longevity.

Treat the people in your network well. Keep them informed about the Project, either through a newsletter or by sending out concise emails and letters periodically. Occasionally you may also want to hold events with the express purpose of updating people in your network. These “Friends of the Project” events need not be elaborate, and can be hosted either by Project staff or the Community Advisory Board. Their main purpose is to maintain among members of your network a sense of involvement in the Project by updating them on what is happening and conveying your own enthusiasm for what you feel is being accomplished.

For example, the Austin Men’s Project (AMP) developed a mutually beneficial relationship with their Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Student Association at the University of Texas (LBGSA). AMP representatives attended their weekly meetings and all of their events to publicize the Project and upcoming Social Outreach Events and other activities. While few members of LBGSA joined the Core Group, many of them regularly attended AMP events.
Win $100 Logo Design Contest

**What:** MPower, a group of young gay/bisexual men (ages 18-29) in Albuquerque working together to build community and promote safer sex, is holding a logo design contest and will award $100 to the winning designer.

**Logo:** The logo will serve as the visual symbol of the Project and will appear on all printed materials including promotional pamphlets, posters, flyers, stationery, t-shirts, etc. The logo should be in black and white, should be capable of being reproduced clearly using a copier, and should look good if reduced in size to two inches. We’d like the logo to be an appealing image that would attract young gay/bisexual men to become involved in Project activities and that would create a positive image of the Project within the Albuquerque gay/bisexual community. The contest is open to everyone, and there’s no limit on the number of designs you can submit. The more exciting, trendy, clever, seductive, sex-positive, community spirited, and eye-catching the logo, the better!

**MPower:** MPower conducts a variety of peer outreach activities in Albuquerque, New Mexico—at bars, gay community events and organizations and other gay settings, informal networking, and small group meetings. We also sponsor events for young gay/bisexual men in Albuquerque ranging from weekly movie nights to hiking trips to large parties and dances at which HIV prevention outreach occur. All the events are fun and offer great opportunities for young gay/bisexual men to meet, socialize, and help build a strong sense of community.

**Entry:** Please submit a detailed sketch of your proposed design on 8.5 x 11 paper. MPower’s Core Group (comprised of 15 young gay/bisexual men from Albuquerque) will then review all submissions and select their favorite. If your design is selected, you will then be asked to produce the final, camera-ready copy of your proposed design. The artist whose design is selected will receive $100 in payment.

**Contact:** John Hamiga, 120 Morningside NE, Albuquerque, NM 87110.

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**Sample Logo Contest Flyer**
For a Valentine's Day dance, the publicity committee decided they wanted to post flyers throughout the community (at three different points in time) and run an ad in the gay paper that comes out one week before the event. As you can see, in a relatively tight timeline, it takes approximately six weeks of planning to do adequate publicity for the dance.

**Sample Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approach volunteer designer with concept</td>
<td>1-3-02</td>
<td>Week One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist produces first draft of flyers and ad</td>
<td>1-7-02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee discusses and gives feedback</td>
<td>1-8-02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist revises flyers and ads</td>
<td>1-12-02</td>
<td>Week Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Group discusses and gives feedback</td>
<td>1-13-02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist revises flyers and ads</td>
<td>1-15-02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test market flyers and ads</td>
<td>1-16-02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist revises flyers and ads</td>
<td>1-20-02</td>
<td>Week Three</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flyers to printer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribution of flyer</td>
<td>1-23-02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flyer uploaded to social networking sites</td>
<td>1-23-02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribution of flyer</td>
<td>1-30-02</td>
<td>Week Four</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placement deadline for 2/6 issue</td>
<td>1-30-02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribution of flyer</td>
<td>2-6-02</td>
<td>Week Five</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event: Valentine’s Day Dance</td>
<td>2-14-02</td>
<td>Week Six</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Download this form as a Word document at [www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure10-2.doc](http://www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure10-2.doc)
# Publicity Plan:
Due Dates and Person Responsible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Strategy</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word of Mouth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach at Venues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Events</td>
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<td>Weekly E-mail</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBGT Student Meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mailing List</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post Flyers/ Calendars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Radio Spot</td>
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<td>Internet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myspace</td>
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Download this form as a Word document at [www.mpowerment.org/download/sfigure10-3.doc](http://www.mpowerment.org/download/sfigure10-3.doc)
Sample Newspaper Article

Attached is an article written by Andrew Hyde for Mu Crew in Dayton, OH. It was submitted to The Advocate’s online edition and published in March of 2005.

The boys are back in town

The youngest *Amazing Race* contestant is now helping to organize activities for young gay, bi, and questioning men in his adopted Ohio hometown. The goal is 90% fun and 10% safer-sex education, and it’s working.

By Andrew Hyde

Hey, you gay men out there: Have you ever heard your friends complain that there is nothing to do where you live? Or that you can’t meet guys anywhere except the bars or the Internet? Well, meeting people is a problem that has plagued gays for decades. If you’re not into drinking or second-hand smoke at clubs, or antsy about meeting a potential serial killer via e-mail, what are your options for dating? Well, the times, they are a-changing.

I was a cast member on *The Amazing Race* on CBS—the openly gay cheerleader son from Kentucky, traveling with his conservative Southern Baptist dad, for you diehard fans out there. Ever since racing around the world and getting those famed 15 minutes you hear so much about, I have strived to use my newfound confidence and international out status to provide strength and guidance to those growing up in the generation behind me.

Just recently I moved to the state of Ohio, and I found that conservatism and closed-mindedness run rampant regardless of where you plant yourself in the Midwest. But there are a few of you trying to change that, and to raise the bar on what is acceptable for gay men. Despite my bad luck not winning the million bucks on TV, I was blessed to find the AIDS Resource Center Ohio, which had the same goal and vision in mind as I do.

ARC Ohio brought me in to coordinate the Mpowerment Project. This Project was created several years ago, evolving out of the University of California, San Francisco’s Center for AIDS Prevention Studies. It has slowly crept across the country and is now nationwide. This program was created to provide a group for gay, bisexual, and questioning men to become a part of, take ownership of, and send out safer-sex education in their communities through social networking.

The Project has been endorsed by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and others for its proven effectiveness in reducing behaviors known to transmit HIV. The program is directed toward guys aged 18 to 29 and is usually funded through grants obtained by the individual AIDS service organizations that sponsor the program.
The Mpowerment Program in Dayton, Ohio, has chosen the title Epsilon Mu Pi, or simply the Mu Crew, which represents the social aspect of a fraternity for young men. Since last fall we’ve been going strong, hosting such events as a pajama party, a Halloween bash, potluck dinners, movie nights, a pool party, and a huge New Year’s blowout. Coming soon we have planned a trip to the world’s largest cave for hiking and camping, and we have a white-water rafting trip in the making, as well as many other huge ideas.

Most guys just out of high school lose a huge portion of their social group, and being gay often makes fraternities or the workplace a difficult place to build a strong circle of friends. The Mu Crew is tailored for those in the professional world as well as for all the students at five surrounding colleges. We have computer geeks, athletes, professionals, students, movie buffs, music freaks, bookworms, gym bunnies, activists; you name it, we’ve got it. We pride ourselves on our diversity and the ability to accept anyone—including their differences.

While our program is only a few months old, we can already count hundreds of individuals who have come to events and heard our safer-sex messages. HIV is on the rise again and we’re doing our best to make sure the young community knows the facts about the virus and how to protect themselves and their friends.

For our program, the winning combination seems to be 90% fun trips, parties, and meetings, and 10% focused educational activities. This seems to be the perfect mix to keep guys involved and yet not burned out on the ongoing message.

When I first moved to Ohio I had no friends for quite some time because I worked so much. I had no one to go to the movies with. Now, with our group, I call one guy from the Crew, and 30 guys show up at the theater to watch a movie with me. We’re reaching the community like wildfire, and I am convinced that over the course of the next couple of years that the rate of new HIV infections will decrease in our area.

Now many guys’ lives in our area have changed. They say, “There’s so much going on I don’t know if I have time for all the parties and camping and stuff.” But I feel that that is a good problem to have.
AMP. GET INVOLVED. Community is what you make of it, and AMP is all about young gay men coming together to build a strong and supportive one. Call 447-4270 or surf www.austinmensproject.com

NO GURLZ ALLOWED! Well, not really, but we are all about young gay/bisexual men building a strong and supportive community. Call 447-4270. GET INVOLVED! www.austinmensproject.com

DOES MOM KNOW YOU’RE GAY? The Austin Men’s Project (AMP) is young gay/bisexual men coming together to build a strong and supportive community. Call 447-4270 or surf www.austinmensproject.com MARTHA SEZ AMP Is a good thing! Young gay, bi, and curious men coming together to build a strong and supportive community. 447-4270 www.austinmensproject.com

AMP - FULL THROTTLE Austin’s first and only young gay/bisexual men’s community-building project. Call 447-4270 for details. David, Jesse, and Luis love you. www.austinmensproject.com

HOT SEX! AMP! BOYS! Now that we have your attention, check out the young gay/bisexual men’s program that’s all about building a strong and supportive community for and by us! 447-4270 www.austinmensproject.com
Objectives

To familiarize you with an important optional element of the Mpowerment Project, the Community Advisory Board (CAB),

1. the role of the board;
2. composition;
3. personal qualities
4. selecting members, and;
5. operation.
Role of board

The Community Advisory Board (CAB) serves as a resource to the Core Group, and helps to nurture and support the Project. It is comprised of men and women who are community leaders and come from the AIDS, gay and lesbian, public health, business, and university communities. The CAB typically meets with the Core Group monthly or bimonthly to provide guidance on Project activities. Its members are individuals in positions of power within the community, or who are particularly knowledgeable about or well connected within the community. Consequently, not only are they able to provide the Core Group with valuable information and advice, but they can also be instrumental in providing access to resources that will facilitate the Project’s operation, such as locating a Project space. They also possess an important historical perspective about the community, such as how other programs have handled similar issues or situations that the Core Group may now be facing.
As the name implies, the CAB is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the Project. Rather, it serves as a sounding board for the Core Group as it formulates long-range plans for the Project or conceptualizes major activities. The role of the CAB is purely advisory; it does not operate as a board of directors, since most community-based organizations already have a board of directors. The implementing agency’s board of directors may occasionally want to give input to the Core Group (or to the Project Supervisor), but will usually not have time to do so. In contrast, the CAB can give all of its attention to the Project, and therefore can be a helpful addition to the implementing agency. The CAB has no fiduciary (financial) responsibility for the Project. The CAB is not a Core Element of the Mpowerment Project. Many Projects, when implemented by community-based organizations, do not have CABs, and this advisory group is not an essential ingredient for implementing the Mpowerment Project. However, CABS often can be very helpful, particularly in securing financial resources and providing guidance.

Liaison with community

CAB members often fulfill a liaison role by providing a link between the Project and the organizations they represent. They keep their organizations informed of the Project’s progress and current activities. By virtue of their connection to various community organizations, CAB members also are in a good position to help the Core Group network in the community.

Ensuring the Project’s future

Another potential role of the CAB is to generate ideas and support for continuing the Project beyond its initial funding period. Often many CAB members may be the same individuals who make decisions regarding HIV-prevention planning and funding in the community. Including these individuals on the advisory board, as well as incorporating their ideas and feedback into Project activities, helps ensure that the Mpowerment Project will meet the HIV-prevention needs that they identify as critical for the community. It also instills in CAB members a sense of ownership of the Project. By participating on the advisory board, these individuals are kept fully informed of the Project’s activities and plans. All of these things help to increase the likelihood that community leaders and decision makers will perceive the Project’s activities as important and a part of a broader community effort.
Composition of the CAB

CAB members are individuals in positions of power or are particularly knowledgeable about or well connected within the community, and can provide valuable advice and access to resources that help the Project.

**Diversity** Since a key function of the CAB is to generate support for the Project, membership on the CAB should reflect the community in which the Mpowerment Project is implemented. By having a CAB that reflects the diversity within the local community, there should always be someone able to provide the perspective of its various constituent groups.

In selecting CAB members, Project organizers should draw from the findings of the community assessment (see Module 2: Community Assessment). The assessment findings will be helpful in choosing CAB members who can represent all the relevant constituencies in the community. Generally this will include men and women, gay/lesbian and straight people, and members from each of the main ethnic/racial groups in the community. The CAB should be a workable size: 10 to 12 members are optimal. Representatives from the following key community sectors should be on the Community Advisory Board:

- HIV/AIDS prevention organizations
- city/county public health department
- gay community (gay community center, relevant gay organizations)
- local college or university
- social service agencies that work with young gay/bisexual men
- the various communities of color
- LGBT business leaders: especially bar owners/managers and leaders in LGBT chambers of commerce

When working in some ethnic/racial minority communities, other expertise on the CAB might be desirable as well. For example, given the central importance of spirituality and religion for African Americans, it can be helpful to have someone from the faith community on the CAB who can give advise about how to weave spirituality into the Project. Of course, this person also has to be supportive and accepting of young gay/bisexual men. When conducting a program for young Latino gay/bisexual men, it may be important to have someone on the CAB who knows about immigration issues in order to provide advise on this important issue.

**Personal qualities** In selecting CAB members, it is extremely important to consider the candidates’ personal qualities. All members must support the philosophy and mission of the Mpowerment Project. Individuals...
Don’t rely solely on those who have been serving on similar boards for years.

who are uncomfortable with young gay/bisexual men embracing their sexuality are not appropriate for the board. Likewise, CAB members must also be able to respect and trust young men to run their own Project. Patronizing attitudes toward the abilities of young men defeat the goals of the Project. It is also essential that CAB members recognize and follow strict boundaries between themselves and the Project staff and volunteers. Most of all, try to select a mix of people who will work comfortably with the Core Group and with each other. If possible, try to avoid selecting individuals who have longstanding feuds with each other or are known to dislike one another. The work of the CAB is too important to be compromised by personal pettiness and bickering. When inviting people to join the CAB, look for potential members with the following qualities:

- expertise in a relevant area (young MSM of color, HIV-prevention programs, fundraising or fiscal expertise, etc.)
- influential within the community (which can include people who have access to gay bars and other community venues)
- decision-making power in community regarding HIV-prevention services and funding
- ability to be a liaison between the Project and the individual’s constituency
- personal compatibility and style in relating to young gay/bisexual men (comfortable, non-patronizing, nurturing)
- compatibility with other CAB members
- availability to attend meetings
- personal qualities (sex-positive, not homophobic)

How to select members

Old voices
If you plan to implement the Mpowerment Project in your community, it is likely that you already know individuals who would be appropriate for the CAB. Members serving on boards of various community organizations might welcome the opportunity to get more involved.

New voices
It is equally valuable, however, to make sure you invite some “fresh” community voices to be on the board, and not rely solely on those who have been serving on similar boards for years. This will help to ensure that the Project maintains its innovative perspective and does not fall into the same patterns as previous HIV-prevention programs in the community. For this reason, it is important to have on the CAB several gay community leaders who may not be affiliated with any particular organizations, but who are perceived by young gay/bisexual men—and the gay community in general—as wise, committed people who may have a lot of ideas and energy to offer the Project. Representatives from the gay bars,
the gay press, and gay professional and social organizations can be especially helpful in facilitating Project activities.

**Making a list of potential CAB members**

The implementing agency can meet with the Core Group to generate a list of potential CAB members. Candidates for the CAB may have been mentioned in the community assessment conducted by the Project Coordinators (see Module 2: Community Assessment). The implementing agency and the Core Group together can consider each candidate, basing their discussion on the criteria presented above, and then agreeing on a final list of candidates through consensus.

**Meeting with candidates**

The Coordinators should meet with each candidate individually. During the meeting, they should discuss the goals of the Mpowerment Project, the role and responsibilities of the CAB members, and why the person is being considered for board membership. Meeting personally with each CAB member prior to the board’s first meeting ensures that everyone coming to the meeting will be “on the same page.” Don’t make the mistake of not meeting with particular CAB members prior to the board’s first meeting. Otherwise, you may discover after it’s too late that a particular member has a personal agenda that disrupts meeting deliberations. We recommend not offering a CAB position to candidates until the Coordinators have met with each person. The initial meeting can be described to the candidate as an opportunity for the Coordinators to describe the program to the person. It can be helpful to ask each prospective CAB member who else he or she thinks might be considered for the CAB, and leave the meeting without asking the individual to join the CAB. This allows time to think through, after the meetings have been completed, who would work well together. It can be quite awkward to invite people to join the CAB and then find out in subsequent individual meetings that certain people do not get along well together. We suggest starting the Core Group and beginning Project activities before convening a CAB. This facilitates the Core Group being the leaders of the Project rather than CAB members misunderstanding their roles and thinking that they should direct the program.

**How the CAB operates**

Typically the CAB meets monthly or bimonthly, although for some Projects quarterly meetings are sufficient. All Core Group members may not be interested or able to attend CAB meetings, but it is important to have at least several Core Group members present in addition to the Project Coordinators. In the past, the Project Coordinators have facilitated CAB meetings, although in one community the CAB elected its own chairperson as facilitator. The typical agenda for a CAB meeting includes an update of current activities by the Project Coordinators, who highlight areas in which Core Group requests advice or assistance. This is followed by discussion among the advisory board members and Core Group. The meeting concludes after those present have
identified whatever actions need to be taken, and then assign specific tasks either to the CAB or the Core Group.

It is helpful for the minutes of the meeting to be sent to all CAB and Core Group members within one week following the meeting. Since CAB members are busy people, they may not be able to attend each meeting, but it is important to keep all members informed about what happens at the CAB meetings. A Core Group representative can then personally contact absent CAB members to solicit any additional input they may have to offer.

**Another possible role for a CAB: life skills mentoring**

If the group of young gay/bisexual men that a Project is trying to reach has many economically disadvantaged members, it may be important to include life skills as an issue to focus on in the program. For example, young men may need to learn about how to balance a checkbook, rent an apartment, or apply for and keep jobs. CAB members may be willing and interested in meeting with the Core Group or other volunteers to discuss and provide mentoring regarding these issues. It may be helpful for some formal events to focus on life skills as, for example, through a panel discussion on employment issues, or workshops on resume writing and balancing checkbooks.

If the CAB is going to be providing such information and mentoring, it is first important to have discussions about how CAB members can appropriately support young men to have safer sex and know their current HIV status. This is because although the content of the CAB-involved events may not be safer sex and testing, issues about HIV prevention might arise nonetheless and CAB members should know how to handle these discussions. Therefore, it may be advisable for CAB members to receive some training on HIV prevention issues. (One possibility is setting up an M-group just for them.)

In addition, careful consideration must be given to the interactions between the Project participants, including the Core Group, and the CAB members. Although rare, there were occasions in some previous Projects that older men who were part of the CAB or younger men who were part of the Project were attracted to each other. Bringing the two groups together needs to be conducted in such a way that does not encourage the development of cross-generational sexual relationships. Hence, we suggest not creating activities that might encourage this. For example, we do not suggest that one-on-one mentoring sessions should be supported and encouraged by the Project. Instead, interactions between the CAB and Project participants should be conducted in group settings.
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Together creating community
for friendship
for health
for life

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San Francisco, CA 94105
415.597.9306

Download a PDF of Module 11, The Community Advisory Board, at
Objectives

To give you: 1) A basic summary of the importance of monitoring and evaluation and how evaluation results can be applied to the Mpowerment Project; 2) A description of detailed Mpowerment Project monitoring and evaluation resources that are available to your organization, and; 3) Evaluation and Planning Forms. These can be copied from the manual or downloaded from the www.mpowerment.org website.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module:

Figure 12.1 Mpowerment Project Outcome Monitoring Survey
Figure 12.2 Focus Groups: Focus Group Guide
Figure 12.3 Community Assessment Interview for Young Gay/Bi Men
Figure 12.4 Community Assessment Data Recording Form
Figure 12.5 Community Assessment Interview for Community Leaders
Figure 12.6 Core Group Evaluation and Planning Form
Figure 12.7 Social Outreach Event Planning Form
Figure 12.8 Social Outreach Event Monitoring Form
Figure 12.9 Social Outreach Event Participant Satisfaction Survey
Figure 12.10 M-group Planning and Recruitment Form
Figure 12.11 M-Group Evaluation: Participant Satisfaction
Figure 12.12 M-Group Outcome Evaluation: Pre-test/Post Test
Figure 12.13 Anecdotal Reports
Figure 12.14 Mpowerment Logic Model
Effective evaluation is dependent upon identification of clear goals and objectives

Before evaluation plans can be determined, it is important to establish clear goals and objectives for the Project. Goals are the big, overarching ideas that the Project is shooting for (e.g., to reduce the frequency of unprotected anal sex among young gay/bisexual men, to increase the proportion of young gay/bisexual men who know their current HIV status). Objectives are the “big steps” a program will take to attain its goals. They can be used to determine a program’s status at any given point in time, and they can be measured during the project period. An example objective: by July 31, 2012, program staff will recruit 200 African American youth (age 15-24) from Oakland, CA to participate in our 3-month intervention. Activities are the specific actions that hopefully lead to achieving those objectives (e.g., implementing large outreach events every two months in which safer sex promotional materials are distributed; running M-groups with eight young men per group every month). Success at achieving goals is not always measurable. In contrast, it is easier to measure success at achieving objectives. Indeed, objectives should be concrete and measurable.
Objectives and activities should relate to the Project’s goals. For example, consider if it makes sense that a community forum should relate to the goal of reducing sexual risk behavior among young men. If the forum is on spirituality, consider how it might relate to sexual risk behavior (e.g., ensure that there is a discussion about how spirituality relates to sexual behavior).

Make sure you are realistic in the evaluation of the objectives. For example, if attempting to evaluate a one-time outreach event, it does not make sense to try and measure its impact in terms of long-term behavior change, although that may be one the project’s goals. Instead, look at more process-related information about achieving this objective, such as how many men attended, which segments of the young men’s community attended (or did not attend), and how many men’s names and contact information were collected for subsequent recruitment to M-groups. This is what we mean when we say that the goals and objectives of the evaluation must be clear and reasonable.

Often Projects have grandiose goals and objectives because the organization thinks that this is what they ultimately want to accomplish or it is what the funders want to see. For example, a goal could be “95% of the men involved in the Project will report reductions in unprotected anal sex among casual partners.” Problems occur when trying to evaluate the Project based on enormous goals and objectives because they are unreasonable to achieve and difficult to measure. For this reason, it is better to have small, readily measurable goals and objectives than sweeping, unrealistic ones. For example, setting a goal to increase awareness of safer sex practices among young gay/bisexual men is fine when coupled with an objective to have 80 unique young gay men attend at least one major outreach event each month. This should not be difficult to document if events take place (e.g., holding monthly Social Outreach Events) that make the objectives readily measurable (e.g., assessing how many men participated in the Social Outreach Event, how many safer sex promotional materials were distributed).

It is better to have small, measurable goals and objectives than sweeping, unrealistic ones.
Why is it important to conduct monitoring and evaluation?

The Mpowerment Project was carefully designed and tested in several different communities to see if it was successful in reducing sexual risk behavior among young gay/bisexual men. The intervention’s success has been established through carefully controlled scientific studies. However, every community and community-based organization (CBO) is somewhat different, and each community and organization that decides to adopt the Project will need to adapt the intervention to its own unique circumstances. With this in mind, it becomes crucial to know if your organization is implementing the Project with fidelity to the way it was originally designed, and if you adapted it, whether the way you have tailored it is in keeping with the Guiding Principles of the intervention. Monitoring and evaluation can assist with determining whether the intervention is being implemented as intended, in addition to making improvements to future programming efforts.

Evaluation can help answer some basic and important questions

Evaluation is the systematic collection of information about a program to better understand elements of the program, improve program effectiveness, and make decisions about future programming.

Important questions the Project should be asking itself include:

- Are we implementing the Project with all the Core Elements and following the Key Characteristics of the Mpowerment Project?
- If we adapted the Mpowerment Project, are we conducting it with fidelity to the Guiding Principles of the original model?
- Was something left out or changed from the Mpowerment Project that may make the intervention more or less effective than originally demonstrated?
- What Mpowerment Project Core Elements are being delivered and to whom?
- How well are the Mpowerment Project Core Elements being implemented?
- Are we obtaining the necessary information we need to satisfy our funder?

There are numerous benefits of having a well thought out monitoring and evaluation plan. These can include the following:

- To determine if the Mpowerment Project is reaching young gay/bisexual men or if it is missing important segments of the community.
To determine if the Mpowerment Project is promoting safer sex, promoting HIV testing, building a healthy community, and empowering volunteers

To determine if the Mpowerment Project’s activities are fun, appealing, sex-positive, and gay-positive

To guide the Mpowerment Project so that it keeps from becoming stagnant, thus allowing the Project to evolve as the young gay/bisexual men’s community evolves

To help garner stronger community support for the Mpowerment Project

To help establish more stable funding sources and hopefully greater longevity for the Mpowerment Project

To establish more efficient program planning by taking out much of the guesswork

Monitoring and evaluation strategies are most successful when they are integrated into every Project activity rather than being seen as separate components. To help your organization develop and implement a successful and integrated monitoring and evaluation plan, refer to the Program Implementation Logic Model (See Fig. 12.14 in the appendix to this module). This logic model can also be found in the CDC Mpowerment Evaluation Field Guide, and it serves as a map for the entire Project.


In addition to this module on evaluation, the CDC Mpowerment Evaluation Field Guide also provides a step-by-step guide to prepare and execute a monitoring and evaluation plan for the Mpowerment Project. It provides sample evaluation objectives and questions throughout the entire implementation process—from pre-implementation, to full-implementation, to sustaining the Project over time. The Guide recommends what kinds of data to collect and provides data collection tools, templates, and protocols to facilitate the evaluation process of each of the Mpowerment Project’s different activities—including data collection schedules, necessary resources, and suggestions for ways to use the data. Appendices to the Guide provide an Mpowerment Project behavioral risk analysis, a conceptual framework, the Mpowerment Project implementation logic model, and a theoretical logic model. These appendices can be extremely helpful as agencies develop grant proposals, reports, and evaluation plans, and we highly recommend that agencies considering adopting the Mpowerment Project model or those currently implementing it study these carefully. Organizations that are directly funded by the CDC to implement the Mpowerment Project are likely required to use the Project’s Evaluation Field Guide.
What approach to evaluation should Mpowerment Projects use?

“Formative evaluation” provides guidance on how a community-based organization (CBO) can best implement a prevention program so that it meets the needs of and is appropriate for the organization’s intended target group. Every CBO needs to conduct some formative evaluation at the outset of implementing the Mpowerment Project. Formative evaluation is also important in determining what is necessary to carry out the program in a manner that matches the desired goals and objectives.

“Process monitoring and evaluation” answer basic questions about what the organization is doing and whom it reaches. The CDC defines process monitoring as a way to document “the characteristics of people served, services provided, and resources used to provide services.” Process monitoring answers questions such as what services were delivered, what population was served, and what resources were used? Process evaluation collects data about how the intervention was delivered in comparison to the intervention plan. Thus, it helps organizations measure fidelity and answers the question “Was the intervention implemented as intended?”

“Outcome evaluation” gives information on whether or not the Project causes changes in attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, and/or behaviors. In contrast to the other types of evaluation, outcome evaluation of the Mpowerment Project is very challenging for CBOs to conduct. The original research on the Mpowerment Project established that the intervention successfully reduces rates of unprotected sex among young gay/bisexual men. This research was costly and involved large-scale randomized, controlled trials that involved entire communities; indeed, the outcome evaluation was more expensive to conduct than the intervention itself. Because the research established the effectiveness of the Mpowerment Project, we strongly urge CBOs running it to focus on analyzing if they are implementing it with fidelity (i.e., using process monitoring and evaluation) rather than attempting to conduct outcome evaluation. More explanation about the problems of using outcome evaluation are described later in this module.

Sometimes organizations and funders wonder what “implementing the project with fidelity” really means, and how it relates to tailoring the project to their own community. Carefully comparing your Project to the Core Elements and Key Characteristics listed in Module 1: Overview, pgs 28-30. Additionally, understanding each Guiding Principle is also crucial to help each organization determine if its adaptations are following the spirit of the intervention. When organizations make thoughtful and intentional changes to the intervention to address the unique characteristics of its community, these modifications are often faithful to the spirit of the original model. For example, a Core Group might decide that its community would benefit from the addition of GED classes. This modification still fits the Guiding Principle of empowerment and does not detract from the program’s fidelity. However, if an organization decides to drop M-groups because of recruitment challenges, this modification results in decreasing fidelity because the Guiding Principle of diffusion of innovations would be lacking in such a
program (and we’re sure no one reading this far into the module would ever consider dropping M-groups completely!).

Because outcome evaluation, or showing that your Project caused the same outcomes as in the original research, is beyond the scope of CBOs’ interests and resources, CBOs are starting to use “outcome monitoring” to measure client attitudes, skills, or behaviors before and after the intervention. Outcome monitoring answers the question, did the expected outcomes occur? However, outcome monitoring does not directly attribute changes to the intervention itself.

Evaluation data entry and analysis

Although many CBOs conduct various types of evaluation and collect data, some sites are unable to analyze and utilize the data they’ve collected. It is more effective to plan ahead for data collection and entry, as well as how to analyze the data and use the findings. These are important to consider before starting to collect data because they may affect how data collection instruments are formatted, what data collection approach to use, or what database to use. Some databases can be used to analyze data once the information is entered (e.g., Excel), whereas other databases may require exporting the data to a statistical software package for analysis. There are also methods of collecting data that (e.g., an online survey system such as SurveyMonkey) go immediately into a database. Making sure that someone at the agency has the time to collect, organize, analyze, and draw conclusions from the evaluation is vital.

Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation provides guidance on how best to implement a prevention program so that it meets the needs of and is appropriate for the intended target group. It is a type of evaluation that is conducted before a program is implemented (during the planning phase). Formative work will need to be done as you tailor the Project to your own community.

A great deal of formative work was conducted early in the development of the Mpowerment Project to ensure that it met the needs of young gay/bisexual men. In conducting formative research, we discovered many of the Guiding Principles that underlie the Project’s Core Elements. For example, it was through focus groups and meetings with HIV prevention providers that we recognized the need for the Project to have a social focus that became one of the Guiding Principles. By conducting formative evaluation, we learned that many young men do not want to attend activities focused primarily on the topic of HIV/AIDS. However, we also learned that they have strong social needs, and that HIV prevention could be effective if it was combined with meeting those needs.

The starting point of formative evaluation for the Mpowerment Project is conducting a community assessment (See Module 2: Community Assessment). The community assessment provides information on various issues concerning what life is like for young gay/bisexual men in the
community, and how the Project can reach them. The community assessment is used to answer key questions, such as:

- What are the different groups of young gay/bisexual men in the community?
- Where do they socialize or congregate?
- What media do they use so that publicity about the project can be effectively targeted to them?

The formative work accomplished during the community assessment process fleshes out information beyond what is already known by the CBO about the community and the young gay/bisexual men who live there. The information gathered will be invaluable throughout the life of the Project, and you may want to consider conducting additional community assessments occasionally, say every two years or so, since communities change over time. Updating your community assessment allows you to identify new developments in your area such as new outreach venues, media outlets, or new crowds of young gay/bisexual men. The answers to these questions (and others) will help you modify and tailor the Project to the specific needs of the men who live in the community.

In addition to the community assessment, which involves brief interviews with young gay/bisexual men, other methods can also be used to conduct formative evaluation. These can include focus groups, direct observations of venues where young men congregate, and other types of individual interviews (e.g., with community or other CBO leaders). The end of this module discusses focus groups.

**Process monitoring and evaluation**

Process monitoring and evaluation occur once the program has been designed and is being implemented. Process *monitoring* refers to the collection of data on the people served, services provided, and resources used. Process monitoring could measure the following aspects of the Mpowerment Project: 1) number of M-groups conducted, 2) number of people attending the M-group, and 3) descriptive information on the people that attended the M-group. Process *evaluation* refers to the collection of data on how the intervention was delivered or what services were provided, differences between the intended target group and actual population served, and access to the intervention. Process evaluation could measure the following aspects of the Mpowerment project: 1) how the M-group was conducted, 2) what curriculum or other materials were used during the M-group session, 3) the extent to which the intended target group attended the M-group, and 4) strengths and/or weaknesses of how an M-group was delivered (e.g., the location of the group, the appropriateness and usability of written materials that were distributed during the group). Process monitoring and evaluation can provide a lot of useful information about the Project, but it does not provide information on changes in attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, or knowledge among the men targeted. Sometimes process monitoring and evaluation are called “M & E.”
Process monitoring and evaluation also involves an effort to describe some of the details of program planning and implementation. Basic process monitoring of the Mpowerment Project can be conducted by asking specific questions such as, “Who is responsible for designing the outreach materials?”, “Who will assemble the materials?”, or “How will the event be publicized?” The answers to these questions are vital to determine if the Project is being implemented with fidelity to the program’s Guiding Principles. For example, if the Project Coordinator is designing all outreach materials, planning the themes of every outreach event, running the Social Outreach Events, and publicizing them himself, then the Project volunteers are not being empowered and may not buy into the Project.

It is helpful to look at pgs 28-30 of Module 1: Overview to see the Core Elements and Key Characteristics (a separate PDF of the Core Elements and Key Characteristics can also be found in the manual section of mpowerment.org in the Evaluation section). The characteristics describe how the Core Elements should be conducted so that they are being done following the Guiding Principles. Then as you are doing process evaluation you can refer to this chart to ensure that you are taking these issues into consideration.

**Outcome evaluation**

Outcome evaluation tells you if the Project is changing young men’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. At first this sounds simple—but it’s not. There are a number of important issues to consider before attempting to conduct an outcome evaluation of this multi-component, community-level intervention. As stated earlier, because of the numerous challenges in conducting outcome evaluation we do not advocate that CBOs attempt conducting outcome evaluation. Instead, we encourage prioritizing ongoing process monitoring and evaluation, and sometimes outcome monitoring (depending on available resources). Indeed, the CDC, in their Mpowerment Evaluation Field Guide, acknowledges these challenges:

Most organizations do not have the capacity to conduct formal outcome evaluations, which require extensive resources, expertise, and time. Therefore, most of your M&E (monitoring and evaluation) activities will focus on formative evaluation, process monitoring and evaluation, and—to a lesser extent—outcomes monitoring.

**Assess the Project as a whole, not individual Core Elements**

The first issue to consider is the importance of evaluating the Project as a whole in order to determine the impact it has. This is because the Mpowerment Project is comprised of a number of different Core Elements (Core Group, Coordinators, Social Outreach Events and Outreach Teams, Informal Outreach, publicity, M-groups, and the Project space) that interrelate, and were developed in order to reach different groups of young men and to target issues that exist at the individual, interpersonal, social and environmental levels. Behavior change is most likely to occur from exposure to the multiple Core Elements because they reinforce each other.
Hearing messages from different people and in different ways is the best way to change behavior. Although one might be tempted to assess the individual Core Elements rather than the whole, the Core Elements together create synergy, and the sum of the combined activities causes a greater impact on the young gay/bisexual men’s community than any one Core Element alone.

In addition, some of the Core Elements were created as a means of helping implement another Core Element. For example, it would be very difficult to conduct the M-groups without the Social Outreach Events that are a part of Formal Outreach because the social events are the primary way of obtaining the names and contact information of young men in the community so they can be recruited into the M-groups. Similarly, the Core Element of publicity is crucial because it spreads the word about the existence of the Project and the various activities the Project hosts. Publicity alone is not expected to change sexual risk behavior, but without it, few men would show up for the Project. Informal outreach, another Core Element, is taught and men are motivated to do in M-groups. We believe that informal outreach alone is unlikely to result in risk reduction, but that it has an impact when implemented along with formal outreach and other Core Elements. Therefore, the overall Project, rather than its separate Core Elements, should be evaluated to determine its impact.
Consider if changes in young gay/bisexual men’s sexual risk behavior and attitudes are because of the Project

Another challenging issue about conducting an outcome evaluation of the Project is how you can tell if changes you see in men’s sexual behavior or attitudes are because of the Project. Suppose, for example, that you find in surveys that men are feeling more concerned about contracting HIV than they felt a year earlier, and you might assume that it is because of the Project. But it is also possible that what caused the change is not related to the Project at all. There could have been a major news event or AIDS-related development that impacted the community that is really the reason for the change. To know if the change is because of the Project, it would be best to look at another community that does not have an Mpowerment Project for a comparison. (In scientific research, the community without the program would be called the “control” or “comparison” community.) However, we recognize that this may be beyond the mission and resources of most CBOs, and that it would be unusual for an organization to conduct surveys in a different community than where their project exists. But without this, it is uncertain that the results of an outcome evaluation are accurate. Certainly you need to monitor what is going on in your community that might account for changes other than the Project’s activities.

Some CBOs have considered looking for a comparison group within their own community, perhaps by identifying a group of young men who have not been a part of the Project. However, it is important to remember that the Mpowerment Project is a community-level intervention which tries to reach all young gay/bisexual men in the community, and the men who participate in the Project in a community may be quite different than men who do not participate in it. For example, it could be that the group of men who participate in the intervention are more out about being gay, are younger, or use drugs and alcohol less than men who do not participate. If this were the case, the two groups—the participants and the non-participants—would be quite different from the outset. Differences found between the two groups regarding attitudes and behaviors could be explained by differences between the groups from the start, not because one group participated in the intervention and the other did not participate. It is not possible to find a logical comparison group within the community itself.

Unfortunately, interpreting the results from an outcome evaluation without a comparison community involves considerable guesswork. For example, let’s say that a Project conducts a baseline evaluation prior to starting and learns that 40% of the young gay men surveyed report having had unprotected anal sex. Then, assume the Project conducts a follow-up survey in the community one year later (after implementing the Mpowerment Project) which reveals that 30% of the men surveyed engaged in risky sex. Can the Project conclude that it was a success? Not necessarily. What if, in the follow-up assessment, the Project had only been able to survey the most motivated men, and the highest risk men just didn’t return the surveys? Or what if, at the follow-up assessment, the Project discovered that 50% of the men reported being risky sexually? Does this mean that the Project was a failure? Again, not necessarily. Perhaps the project had just recently started conducting new
outreach activities that were attracting young men who practice more risky sex, and these were the men that were surveyed. They might not yet have had enough exposure to the Project’s activities for it to affect their risk behavior. So while it may be possible to document behavior change in the community over time, it is not possible to conclude with total certainty if or how the Project contributed to (or failed to contribute to) the change.

**Timing of outcome assessments**

Some projects use community surveys of young gay/bisexual men to measure risk behavior and attitudes. These surveys take a “snapshot” of the community at a certain point in time. Theoretically, it is possible to use these surveys to help monitor a project’s outcomes. For example you could survey young men in your community before starting the Mpowerment Project and compare those results to what’s happening to men later, after the Project has been going on for a while. Then it is necessary first to assess behaviors, beliefs and attitudes of young gay/bisexual men in the community before implementing the Project (also called “baseline” assessments). Data collected at baseline are then compared with data collected after the intervention has been going for a while (called “follow-up” assessments). This approach requires sufficient funding, resources, and expertise. In our experience, most funders have not been allocated sufficient resources at the right time to make this sort of outcome monitoring possible. This type of outcome monitoring requires conducting a baseline survey at community venues before starting Project activities. Then it is important to consider when to conduct follow-up assessments. Typically follow-up assessments are conducted at regular intervals, usually annually. But we give a warning here: the first follow-up assessment should only be undertaken after there has been sufficient time for many young gay/bisexual men in the community to be affected by the Project, that is, after the Project has had sufficient time to implement all of the Project’s Core Elements for a substantial time period. It can often take many months for a Project to get fully implemented. The follow-up assessment should only be conducted after the Project has been fully implemented for at least a year. Again, don’t forget the caveats above: even baseline and follow-up surveys conducted in a single community do not allow you to attribute causes in attitudes or behavior to the Project itself.

**Surveying the same men at assessments over time – or not?**

There are pros and cons of different approaches to outcome assessments. The basic idea is to survey men before they are involved in the Project or before the Project begins and then do additional assessments at a later time point and examine if there are changes in attitudes or behaviors. But in one approach, you survey the same men over time, whereas in another approach you survey whoever is there at each time point and don’t worry if they are the same men.
If you study the same men over time, you can analyze if particular groups of men changed or did not change over time (e.g., you can see if younger or older men or if different ethnic/racial groups changed from involvement with the Project). That’s a plus. However, there are some important downsides of studying the same men over time. First, you need to resurvey as many men as possible so you don’t end up with a group of men in your evaluation who are somehow different than the men with whom you were not able to follow over time. Another downside is that to get men to be involved over time may require incentives such as movie passes, gift certificates, or a small stipend. An additional downside is that you need to be able to match-up or “link” men’s surveys that they complete at different time points, and this can be a little complicated and makes it more challenging to keep participants’ identities anonymous. We discuss later how you can link up the pre- and post-tests so that they remain anonymous.

You may feel, however, that it is unnecessary to analyze if different groups of men changed more or less, and therefore may not feel the need to link up men’s scores pre and post-test. Instead, you might be fine with being able to analyze on average what participants did before they attended the group and then compare it with an average of what men did post-group. This is simpler than matching surveys.

If you want to link surveys to each other, you can do so by creating a code. For example, you can take the first and third letter of a young man’s mother’s maiden name, the first and last letter of his father’s first name, plus the month and day he was born. For someone whose mother’s maiden name is Diantonio, his father’s first name is James, and who was born on September 19th, the code will end up being: Dajs0919.
Approaches to outcome assessments
(even though monitoring and evaluation is preferable!)

If a Project is going to use community surveys to measure changes in behavior and attitudes, then there are three different methods that we suggest here.

Method 1: Longitudinal, Community Sample

In this first method, you might assess the same young men over time (which is called “longitudinal”), and the men you survey are in the community and may or may not be connected to the Project. You could initially collect surveys and contact information from men at venues where guys hang out (for example, at clubs or bars). You can use an online survey method if you get their e-mail addresses (for example, SurveyMonkey), or you can mail men surveys and with postage paid return envelopes. This approach assesses the extent to which the Project is becoming known in the community and if there are changes in sexual risk behavior and HIV testing that are because of the Mpowerment Project’s activities.

A really important issue is trying to get as many men as possible to return the surveys. You need to think out carefully how you will keep the men completing additional surveys over time. For example, you might pay them a small stipend, gift certificate, or movie tickets to do so. You will also need to keep track of men’s contact information (e.g., their cell phone number) in between surveys since men move a lot. If you are unable to get many of the same men back in for additional surveys and only end up with a small subset of men completing surveys, then this could be a “biased” sample that is not very representative of young men in general. You might end up only surveying guys who are more stable (not moving a lot, happier to participate in a survey), which also might mean that they are less risky. So you want to get back into the community and survey as many men as possible.

Method 2: Cross-sectional, Community Sample

In this second method, you would also survey men in the community who may or may not be connected to the Project. You could collect surveys at venues where guys hang out (e.g., clubs or bars), but you would not try to follow-up with them. So this would simply be a “cross-section” of men in the venues. Alternatively, you could collect e-mail addresses from men and then send them an online survey method if you get their e-mail addresses (for example, using SurveyMonkey).

You would then do another survey in the same way, using the same survey questions, at a later time. As much as possible, it is important to try to survey men at the same places or types of places, and at the same time of night. This is because men who show up to the bar at different times of night might be more or less risky (for example, it may be that men who are riskier attend the bar later at night). This is certainly simpler than doing longitudinal surveys—but you don’t know for sure you are getting the same types of men. When you see changes in sexual risk behavior or attitudes, it is hard to be sure if there really are changes going on or if you just surveyed guys who are more or less at risk than the original group of men you surveyed.
Method 3: Longitudinal, Project Sample

Another approach to conducting an outcome assessment is to focus on men who are just starting to come to the Project. Their baseline assessment would occur when they first show up, and then they would be sent additional surveys over time to see the impact the Project has on them. This is complicated for a few reasons. First, this requires tracking men over time. That requires considerable resources to keep the men’s contact information and updating it from time to time. Second, you have to figure out incentives to get the men to participate in additional surveys. This could be a movie pass or a small stipend or a gift card to a local store. The same issue that we mentioned earlier is relevant here: you need to get back into your follow-up survey as many men as possible so you do not get a “biased” sample.

Then there is the issue of what constitutes being “new” to the Project vs. already being affected by it. We think it is highly unlikely that someone will change their sexual behavior just because of attending one or two events, for example. We propose that the definition of men who are new to the Project exclude anyone who has previously:

- Attended an M group
- Participated in 3 or more Mpowerment Project activities in the last 12 months

How much involvement men have had in the Project would need to be assessed through a survey that men would complete when they come to the Project. If they are not excluded because of previous involvement in the Project, then they could be recruited to participate in an outcome monitoring project that would involve sending them surveys over time to see if their behavior and/or attitudes change after being involved with the Project. All the issues that have been discussed previously would pertain to following these men over time, including needing to figure out ways to track them, giving them incentives to participate, figuring out how to keep their information confidential, and so forth.

Outcome evaluation of M-Groups

Despite our reservations about conducting a meaningful outcome evaluation of the Mpowerment Project by examining only an individual Core Element, some funders still require it and therefore, we provide guidance on this issue. The Core Element most feasible to conduct outcome evaluation on is the M-groups. Self-administered surveys concerning beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and behavior can be conducted with young men before they attend a group (pre-test), and then at some later point in time (post-test). The post-test cannot be done immediately after the group is conducted if you are trying to look at behavioral change. Thus a later time point needs to be chosen to resurvey young men, such as one month later if you want to look at more than changes in attitudes, beliefs and intentions.

As we have described previously, conducting a post-test after an M-group has its challenges, such as keeping men’s contact information and tracking
them over time in order to send them surveys, and encouraging enough men to return the post-test surveys so that you don’t have a biased sample. Also as we have said earlier, if only a small proportion of men participate in a post-test assessment, it is difficult to know if they differ substantially from the men who do not return a post-test survey on some important issues such as continued involvement in the Project or being different in terms of sexual risk behavior.

**Evaluation should involve reflection and feedback to improve the Project**

There are three major reasons for conducting process monitoring and evaluation: to know how well a Project is functioning, to determine how to improve it, and for use in obtaining and maintaining funding. Too often, CBOs only use the data because they need it to write grant proposals or because their funder requires they collect it. But the first two reasons to collect data are of utmost importance because they should be used to make the program function better. They tell you if a Project is working well and what needs improvement. Therefore, there should be a feedback loop: data collection, data analysis and reflection, and taking actions to improve the Project—and then starting the evaluation process over again to see if the corrective actions did indeed improve the Project.

For example, process monitoring and evaluation may indicate that M-groups are not being held frequently enough so that all young men coming into the Project are attending them. This would mean that the Core Element that has the strongest impact on sexual risk reduction and which teaches and motivates young men to do informal outreach has to be increased in frequency. Similarly, process monitoring data might indicate that Social Outreach Events are only attracting the same group over time and not reaching into new groups of men, or are only attracting a small group of men. Analyzing this can result in thinking out Social Outreach Events that reach into diverse parts of the community, or creating activities that draw larger groups of men.

It is also important to keep analyzing the overall goals of the Project and the objectives and how these do or do not match up, and then make changes in the Project accordingly. For example, a project’s goal might be to reduce sexual risk behavior among young men, and an objective might be attract thirty-six young men to discussion groups. Related activities might be to conduct a publicity campaign and to hold three discussions over four months regarding internalized homophobia. But the logic that links these activities to their objective and goal should be considered—in this case, considering why discussions about internalized homophobia should be related to reducing sexual risk behavior. Upon reflection, it may become clear that the link between sexual risk and homophobia would not be immediately clear to young men, and therefore such discussions should also include talking about how internalized oppression can cause men to be unmotivated to care for themselves, including having risky sex. As this example illustrates, the analysis of the linkage between the objective and the goal helps to consider how to make the Project more effective.
Focus groups are useful for many aspects of evaluation

One way of gathering information on topics of relevance to your Project is through the use of focus groups. A focus group is a discussion among a selected group of 8-10 people that explores a limited set of topics, and is usually guided by a trained facilitator. Focus groups are most suitable for topics that become clearer through group discussion and the reflection it generates. They often work well when trying to get individuals to express widely held beliefs or practices among the group. For example, a focus group could be convened in order to find out what young gay/bisexual men think about advances in HIV treatment, how this affects their decision making processes about safer sex, and how the Mpowerment Project can address this issue.

Focus groups are good at generating preliminary information quickly. Two two-hour focus groups comprised of ten individuals in each group could be conducted in two days. By comparison, it would be difficult to hold 20 two-hour interviews in the same amount of time.

Focus groups are particularly helpful to use to generate information during initial planning of the Mpowerment Project as a part of formative evaluation. They can be particularly helpful to use before starting the Project to analyze how young men feel about a variety of issues. Themes that emerge from the focus group discussion can be used to help inform where the Project should be located in the community, men’s feelings about the “parent” CBO, the development of formal outreach events, what Project materials should address and their appearance, and what safer sex messages should be developed by the Project.

Focus groups can also be used at various times while the Project is being implemented. For example, if process data indicates that certain members of a group within the community are not attending Project activities, a focus
group that includes members of that constituency can help explain why. In addition, listening to a group of young gay/bisexual men talk about an issue may give insight into the language they use, and into what things they believe contribute to or prevent them from enjoying satisfying social lives.

Focus groups can be used to provide information about how to be more effective in attracting more young gay/bisexual men to Mpowerment Project events.

Focus groups can also be helpful in other ways regarding evaluation and monitoring. They can be used to ask a group of young gay/bisexual men in the community if they think the Project is changing young men’s knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and if so, how. They can also be used to clarify the meanings of the questions you use for interviews and evaluation surveys. By asking focus group participants how they interpret the meaning of survey or interview items, you can be clearer that these really assess what you are intending to assess. Focus groups can also be helpful as a resource for interpreting evaluation and monitoring results. For example, you may not completely understand what some interviews meant or what the outcomes of a survey might mean. These can be discussed in a focus group to get a deeper understanding from young men about the issues.

**Focus group facilitators**

The facilitator is the focus group’s host, guide, and timekeeper. You can hire a trained facilitator—or better yet, get a professional from the gay/lesbian community to volunteer his time. (If you’re dealing with a sensitive topic, it might be best to have a gay man serve as facilitator). Or you can train a staff member. No matter which arrangement you make, select a skillful person to facilitate the group, since this role is a challenging one. The facilitator must feel comfortable leading the group, be a good listener, and readily pick up on verbal and nonverbal cues. The facilitator must understand that his or her role is to solicit information from the group rather than to give it. The facilitator must be able to manage people who dominate the conversation and draw out those who tend to hang back.

Providing a comprehensive overview of effective focus group facilitation is beyond the scope of this manual, and we highly recommend seeking outside sources for in-depth information and skills-training. Any facilitator must
be comfortable with the topic and the participants, and he or she must also be able to probe for a deeper understanding of the topic. The facilitator needs to ask clarifying questions and make clarifying statements in order to make explicit any points that may be understood by the group but have not been voiced directly. Say things like “So what I hear you saying is…” or “It sounds like you’re saying…” and then include a statement that best fits the situation. Is that right?” “Is that correct?” Often it is helpful to have two facilitators, since they can assist each other if the discussion bogs down at any point, and they can work together to encourage participation from all participants.

Audio taping the focus group is recommended, and then hiring someone to transcribe what was said. Having a transcript of the focus group recording can also benefit others who may not have been present. If you plan on recording the focus group, test the recording device before conducting the session in order to address potential equipment issues. That way you can avoid the frustration of finding out after the group has ended that the microphone did not work and you failed to record some illuminating discussions. If a Project cannot afford the cost of transcription, then it is best to have one or two people to type up notes during the focus group.

Although recording and transcribing is the recommended method for beginning analysis of the focus group data, to save time and money, you can also just record the focus groups and then have program staff listen to the recordings to pull out the most useful information. Don’t plan on having the focus group facilitator try to remember everything that was said, because he or she may be too distracted about trying to run the group and may not remember very much of what was said.

Pre-planning about which topics to explore in a focus group is essential to its success. Attempting to cover too many topics encourages superficial discussion. If you have too many topics you would like to cover, it is preferable to organize an additional focus group in order to cover some of the topics. For each topic you want to explore, write down questions that you think will generate the most valuable discussion. Your list of questions will form the focus group guide to be used during the focus group. While it is advisable to limit the number of topics you cover, have plenty of questions about each topic written down to use in order to generate discussion on it. This will help ensure that the discussion goes deeper into a topic rather than staying on a superficial level. Every question you write up beforehand does not need to be asked if the discussion covers the issues anyway. The questions should be considered “prompts” to ask in case you need some ideas about how to deepen the discussion. Strive to ask questions that cannot be answered by a simple, “yes” or “no” response because that will help ensure discussion.
What this measures: Sexual risk behavior and informal outreach

Evaluation type: Outcome

Objectives:
1. To assess the impact of the Mpowerment Project on sexual risk behavior
2. To assess if men are encouraging friends to have safer sex
3. To assess if men are encouraging friends to get tested for HIV regularly

Comparing the Mpowerment Project Outcome Monitoring Survey with the CDC’s Spot Survey

We provide the Mpowerment Project Outcome Monitoring Survey here. The CDC’s Spot Survey (found in the CDC Mpowerment Evaluation Field Guide on www.effectiveinterventions.org) is an alternative option for conducting outcome monitoring for the Mpowerment Project. The CDC Spot Survey is longer than our Outcome Monitoring Survey. The CDC’s survey combines our Outcome Monitoring Survey and our M-group Outcome Evaluation: Pre-test/Post-test (See Fig. 12.12), plus two additional scales: one that measures intention to engage in safer sex and a second that measures self-esteem.

Using the Outcome Monitoring Survey

As discussed earlier in Module 12: Evaluation, there are at least three ways to do an outcome assessment: Method 1: Longitudinal, Community Sample, Method 2: Cross-sectional, Community Sample, or Method 3: Longitudinal, Project Sample. Whichever method used, a survey is part of it. The sample survey we provide below can be used for any of these three methods. The Outcome Monitoring Survey can be modified or simply copied and used. The first part of the survey asks basic questions about age, racial/ethnic group, educational background, how they self-identify sexually, HIV status, and relationship status. The next statements are about sexual risk behavior, specifically anal sex and condom use and HIV testing. As you can see, they are very simple and straightforward questions. After that are the questions about informal outreach (speaking with friends about safer sex and testing).

For Method 1, in which you follow a community sample over time, or Method 2, a community sample that is not followed over time, you can distribute the Mpowerment Project Outcome Evaluation Survey while you conduct the Community Assessment (See Module 2: Community Assessment). For Method 3, you would give the survey to men who are coming into the Project but who have not participated much yet (e.g. anyone who has not attended an M-group and has been to three or fewer Mpowerment activities in a 12 month time period).

The questions concerning sexual risk behavior are quite personal. If you are not doing follow-up surveys of the same men over different times points (“longitudinal surveys”), it is best to collect such information anonymously. So it is important to emphasize to men completing the surveys that no name or identifying information is asked for on the survey. To assure more anonymity, distribute the surveys with envelopes, instructing participants to place their completed surveys in the envelopes and to seal them.

On the other hand, if you are trying to assess the same men over time, you need to figure out a way to be able to link the surveys to each other. You can assign an ID to each man’s name. As soon as you have a young man’s follow-up survey, you can write the ID on it and remove the name and store the name and the ID in a locked file. Real names should never be kept with surveys. We provide another idea about developing a code for linking surveys on the bottom of page 13 of this module.

(continued on following page)
How to Calculate a Score regarding Sexual Risk Behavior and What It Means

Let’s imagine that you distributed the intervention evaluation survey before the Project started to one hundred young gay/bisexual men randomly surveyed at clubs or bars. One year later you again distributed the intervention evaluation survey to another one hundred young gay/ bisexual men who are also randomly selected. Now you want to compare the information to see if there are any changes between the intervention evaluation surveys distributed before the Mpowerment Project began and a year later.

In order to do this, calculate the percentage of the men surveyed who engaged in each behavior that you asked about at each point in time. The simplest way to arrive at a score is by entering all the responses to each question into a computer database program (e.g., Excel, Filemaker Pro, or Microsoft Access) and then run a descriptive statistical analysis to determine what percentage of men engaged in a certain behavior at a given point in time. You would want to look at means or averages (they are the same thing) of responses. If you do not know how to create and query a database, we suggest that you get assistance from a Project volunteer with expertise in computer databases or ask someone from a local university or college to assist you. You may also be able to find some technical assistance with computer databases from your local or state health department or from a national technical assistance or capacity building organization.

For example, it might be interesting for you to know if the baseline proportion of men engaging in unprotected receptive anal sex with a non-boyfriend is the same as the proportion of men engaging in unprotected receptive anal sex with a non-boyfriend at your one year follow-up. You would likely be interested in figuring out how many of the men had engaged in unprotected anal sex even once in the past period of time (we ask about the last 2 months). You would then compare what percentage of men engaged in unprotected anal sex in the follow-up assessment. You might want to do comparison of different groups, say younger men versus older men, or men of different ethnic/racial groups.

For the boyfriend questions, you have a couple of decisions to make regarding what you consider unsafe sex. First, it is important to know that many men these days are contracting and spreading HIV through their boyfriend relationships since they do not necessarily know who is HIV+ and who is not if men are not completely current with knowing their HIV status. Second, you might use the monogamy questions to define who is practicing safer sex. If both men in a relationship have not committed to monogamy, then it is possible that they could bring HIV into their relationship and therefore should consistently be having safer sex. Therefore, you might decide to define safety within boyfriend relationships to include monogamy. On the other hand, you might decide that no young men should be having anal sex without condoms, even within love relationships, because of the uncertainty of HIV-status. You and your organization have to decide how to define it.

What the Results Mean

This type of measurement gives you a snapshot of sexual risk behavior among the young gay/ bisexual men surveyed. It can indicate trends in behavior and provide valuable information that can help you to tailor specific HIV prevention messages for the young gay/bisexual men in your community. For example, if you find through the Outcome Evaluation Survey that a number of men (let’s say 40% of those surveyed) engaged in unprotected anal sex with their boyfriends in the past 2 months, you could focus attention on this in your outreach materials.

(continued on following page)
Other questions that might be included on an Outcome Survey

If a Project has no money whatsoever to use to be an incentive to participate in a survey, or no human resources to input data into a database, then the simplest survey might be the best to use. That would include some of the background questions and the behavioral questions and that’s all. Or you might want to include a few more questions, and that might be if the men are doing informal outreach with their friends. We have included those questions on the sample survey as well.

You might want to ask some other questions in addition, however, either because you can provide stipends and have the “manpower” needed to input the survey data, or because you are compelled to do so by your funder, or because you feel that men in your community would likely fill out a longer survey even if they aren’t paid to do so. So we have included a few additional questions that you may or may not want to ask.

We have included on additional pages that you can download or copy and add to your survey:

- **Questions about enjoyment of safer sex and sexual self-efficacy.** These are both scales, not single items, and the way to use and calculate a score for the scales is detailed in Figure 12.12 M-group Outcome Evaluation: Pre-test/Post-test.

- **Questions about involvement with the Mpowerment Project.** You might be interested in looking at differences in sexual risk behavior among men who have participated in the Project with men who have not participated in the Project. But, be thoughtful about what “participation” means. You would not expect someone to change their risk behavior just from attending a single social event. Instead, you might define participation as having attended an M-group, several social events, and so forth.

- **Questions about Tobacco, Drug and Alcohol Use.** If your project especially focuses attention on substance use and the importance of reducing it, then these are some questions you might include. It is important to note, however, that unless you particularly focus on these issues, you shouldn’t expect the Project to impact them. Just because men are part of the Mpowerment Project doesn’t mean that they automatically reduce their substance use.

(continued on following page)
Mpowerment Project Outcome Monitoring Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please answer the following questions honestly. Your responses will remain anonymous.

1. Today’s date: ____ / ____ / ____ (month/date/year)

2. Your age? ________________

3. What city do you live in? ________________________________

4. Were you born as a male or a female?
   - Male
   - Female

5. How do you view yourself now (i.e., what is your current gender)?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Transgender: male-to-female
   - Transgender: female-to-male
   - Don’t know

6. What best describes your race? (Check all that apply.)
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African American
   - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - White

7. What best describes your ethnicity?
   - Hispanic or Latino (If Hispanic/Latino, what is your ethnic group? _________________)
   - Not Hispanic or Latino

8. What is the highest level you completed in school? (Check one)
   - Some high school
   - High school degree or equivalency (GED)
   - Technical or vocational school
   - Some college
   - College degree (e.g., BA, BS)
   - Some graduate school
   - Graduate degree (e.g., PhD, MD, JD, DDS, MA, MS, MPH)

9. Are you currently a student? (Check one)
   - Yes, full-time
   - Yes, part-time
   - No

10. Which of the following terms best describes you? (Check one)
    - Gay
    - Bisexual
    - Straight/Heterosexual
    - Other: __________________________________________

(continued on following page)
11. What is your HIV status? (Check one)
   - HIV-negative
   - HIV-positive
   - Prefer not to answer
   - Never been tested for HIV or never got results

12. When was the last time you were tested for HIV and got your results? (if you are HIV-positive, skip to question 13)
   - In the past 6 months
   - In the past year
   - More than a year ago
   - Never been tested for HIV or never got results

13. Please check the box next to each activity you did with your boyfriend/lover in the past 2 months.
   - I did not have a boyfriend/lover in the past 2 months (please skip to question 15).
   - You put your penis in his ass with a condom.
   - You put your penis in his ass without a condom and pulled out before you came.
   - You put your penis in his ass without a condom and came inside him.
   - Your partner put his penis in your ass with a condom.
   - Your partner put his penis in your ass without a condom and pulled out before he came.
   - Your partner put his penis in your ass without a condom and came inside you.

14. How do you and your boyfriend handle sex outside of your relationship?
   - Neither of us have sex outside of our relationship
   - He has sex outside our relationship.
   - I have sex outside of our relationship.
   - Both of us have sex outside of our relationship.

15. Please check the box next to each activity you did with a man in the past 2 months who was not your boyfriend/lover.
   - I did not have sex with a man in the past 2 months who was not my boyfriend/lover (please skip to question 16).
   - You put your penis in his ass with a condom.
   - You put your penis in his ass without a condom and pulled out before you came.
   - You put your penis in his ass without a condom and came inside him.
   - Your partner put his penis in your ass with a condom.
   - Your partner put his penis in your ass without a condom and pulled out before he came.
   - Your partner put his penis in your ass without a condom and came inside you.

16. How many months has it been since you were tested for HIV and received your test results? ________ months

17. How many times did you encourage a friend to have safer sex in the last month? ________

18. How many friends did you encourage to have safer sex in the last month? ________

19. How many times did you encourage a friend to get tested for HIV in the last month? ________

20. How many friends did you encourage to get tested for HIV in the last month? ________
Scales Measuring **Attitudes Toward Enjoyment of Safer Sex and Sexual Self Efficacy**

**How much do you agree with these statements?**

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling the number which best fits your response to each item. Use this scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe sex is less pleasurable than unsafe sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a condom takes the fun out of sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safer sex is unsatisfying.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes if I’m really turned on, I have trouble only doing safer sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If someone I’m having sex with starts to do something unsafe, it is hard for me to stop him.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it difficult telling a sex partner not to do something I think is risky.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have trouble letting a sex partner know that I want to have safe sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions Measuring Project Involvement

1. Have you ever heard about the Mpowerment Project? *(If no, then skip the rest of the survey)*
   - □ Yes
   - □ No

2. In the past 12 months, have you been to an Mpowerment Project event?
   - □ Yes
   - □ No

Please list the events that you’ve attended:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

3. If you have been to an event, why did you attend? If not, why didn’t you attend?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

4. Have you been to Core Group Meetings? If so, how many: ______________________

5. Would you consider yourself to be part of the Core Group?
   - □ Yes
   - □ No

6. Have you been to an M-group?
   - □ Yes
   - □ No

What suggestions do you have to improve the Mpowerment Project?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
### Scale Measuring Self-esteem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you like most aspects of your personality?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel you deserve other people’s respect?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you proud of who you are?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel you take good care of yourself?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you look at your life, do you feel satisfied?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, do you feel in charge of your life?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel you have a sense of direction and purpose in your life?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that you respect yourself?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Scale Measuring Drug/Alcohol/Tobacco Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>A few times</th>
<th>About once a month</th>
<th>Several times a month</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>Several times a week</th>
<th>Every day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the past six months, how many cigarettes did you smoke per day?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the past six months, how often did you drink alcohol (beer, wine, liquor)?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the past six months, how often did you smoke marijuana (pot)?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the past six months, how often did you use other drugs (for example: heroin, speed, cocaine, ecstasy, special-K, GHB, mushrooms, acid, etc.)?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Which drugs did you use?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>A few times</th>
<th>About once a month</th>
<th>Several times a month</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>Several times a week</th>
<th>Every day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the past six months, how often did you use poppers (nitrates)?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the past six months, how often did you use needles to inject drugs?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Focus Group Guide**

**What this measures:** Information on various topics gathered from groups of young gay/bisexual men.

**Evaluation type:** Formative, Process and Outcome; also see Module 2, Community Assessment.

Focus groups can be held on many different topics. They can be used whenever you want to find out from a population (in our case, usually young gay/bisexual men) their opinions, observations, and attitudes about a topic. Focus groups typically don’t get into deeply personal issues. They are helpful when you would like to have a discussion on a topic and observe the group’s reactions to issues, including each others’ views and experiences.

A sample discussion guide follows for a focus group on the topic of “What issues are important to young gay/bisexual men in your community?” When you look at the questions below, note that none can be answered by a simple “yes” or “no” response. The questions are intentionally worded so as to stimulate discussion on each topic, and to discourage quick answers.

Good discussions occur if there is a relatively talkative group of 10-12 men, which often requires recruiting 15 or so in case there are no-shows. If at all possible, it is helpful to provide some compensation to the men for providing their time for a 2-3 hour group (e.g., movie tickets, gift cards). Serving food and drink is helpful too. Since there are many good resources about how to conduct focus groups, we refer you to just a few of them here:

*Focus Groups As Qualitative Research* (1988)/ David L. Morgan/Sage Press
*Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the State of the Art (SAGE Focus Editions) (Paperback)*

**Welcome Participants**
- Introduce yourself.
- Thank them for their participation in the group.
- Distribute and review consent form.
- Discuss payment (if participants will receive a stipend).
- Ask participants to complete tags with any desired name.

**Explain Purpose of Focus Group**
- To gain a better understanding of young gay/bisexual men’s perceptions and concerns about safer sex.
- To gather information about the community to guide the planning and implementation of prevention activities.

**Explain Focus Group Process**
- Focused discussion about a particular topic.
- Facilitator asks questions to the group, clarifies terms, and summarizes.
- Recorder takes notes, but does not directly participate in the group.
- Participants discuss the topics.
- If the process will be audio taped, explain that focus group will be recorded on an audio tape and that it will be erased after the information has been compiled.

*(continued on following page)*
Establish Ground Rules

• One person speaks at a time.
• Speak loudly and clearly.
• Respect confidentiality of the group.
• Free to leave at any time if needed.

Discussion Questions

What is life like here for young gay/bisexual men?

How much of a sense of community is there for young gay/bisexual men?

What are the good things about living here for young gay/bisexual men?

What do you feel are the greatest needs of young gay/bisexual men in (insert community name)?

How do you feel young gay/bisexual men are dealing with HIV and the threat of getting AIDS?

How effectively do you think young gay/bisexual men have been reached with HIV prevention messages?

A group of young gay/bisexual men are starting a community-building Project in (insert community name here). Would you be willing to participate? Why or why not?

How willing do you think other young gay or bisexual men would be to get involved with this Project?

What effects would you like this Project to have on young gay or bisexual men in (insert community name)?

What factors in (insert community name) will make the implementation of the Project go smoothly?

What factors might be a problem when trying to implement this Project?

What issues would you like the Project to address?

Download this form as a Word document at www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure12-2.doc
**Community Assessment Interview for Young/Gay Bisexual Men**

**What this measures:** Information on various topics related to the Project gathered individually from young gay/bisexual men and community leaders

**Evaluation type:** Formative; also see Module 2, Community Assessment where there is more information about the use of the Community Assessment Interview

**Objectives:**

1. For the Coordinators to gain a shared understanding of the community.
2. To develop a self-reflective process of broader issues in the community.
3. To start the diffusion process about the Project and its goals.
4. To identify, get to know, and involve the various segments of the community; develop strategies to reach those segments.
5. To get ideas about where formal outreach and publicity might happen in the community where various groups of young men can be reached.

Community Assessment Interviews are a type of formative research since they are used in planning the Project. If they are used later in the Project as an organization is trying to make sure that it is still reaching the diverse populations of the young men’s community, it would still be considered formative research. The questions can be modified to reflect the uniqueness of your community. There are many suggested questions for other types of community assessment interviews included in the Module. We have also developed a form you can use to write down answers to the questions (See Figure 12.4 Community Assessment Data Recording Form).

**We suggest conducting interviews in the following way.**

1) Identify a young man to interview. Describe to him, in brief, that a new Project is coming to town that focuses on community-building among young gay/bisexual men, and that the Project will be social in nature, and will involve young men as decision-makers about the Project. It will be for young gay/bisexual men, run by young gay/bisexual men. When doing this interview, you are not only finding out information for the Project, but beginning the first steps of publicity about the Project.

2) Ask him to identify the names of different groups or crowds that are in the in the young gay/bisexual men’s community. As he lists them, write down the names of each group that is mentioned, one group per line on the following form.

4) When the young man runs out of groups to list, read back the list and ask him if any other groups come to mind. Record notes on any answers.

5) Then ask the questions on the following form concerning one group at a time. Ask him all the questions about the first group, and then when completed with that group, begin asking all of the questions about the second group, and so forth until you complete all of the questions. Note: there is no need to go over every single group he mentions if you have already gathered considerable information about one group from other interviews already or if a group is very, very small.

*(continued on following page)*
As stated earlier, Figure 12.4 is the data collection form to use when writing down answers. You can do it a few different ways and you should decide beforehand what makes the most sense given what you are trying to find out.

Look over the data you collect and see if there are some groups that the men consistently mention (even if they don’t use the exact same name to describe them). Compile the information and write up a general description in the Community Assessment Compilation Form. If groups are different, write them up in different columns. Don’t worry if not everyone says the exact same thing about the groups. Look for common ideas across the guys you interviewed and for differences as well. Both are of interest.
Figure 12.4
Community Assessment Data Recording Form

Date: ____/____/____ (month/day/year)

Length of interview: ______________________________ minutes

Staff: Staff ID: ________________________________

Place of interview:
- Business
- Agency
- Clinic/healthcare facility
- Residence
- Community event
- Entertainment event
- College/university
- Church or other religious place
- Bar/club
- Street/hangout
- Other
  Please list specific location: ________________________________

Gender:
- Male
- Female
- Transgender–male to female
- Transgender–female to male
- Unknown

Identifies as:
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Straight

Ethnicity:
- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino

Race: (Check all that apply)
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- White

Age: ______________________________

(continued on following page)
Appendix
Module 12: Monitoring and Evaluation

[Directions: You should have many copies of this form with you to conduct interviews, since one copy will be used for each group you are collecting information on. If you ask each individual you interview about four groups, you’ll need four forms for each interview.]

“Thinking about all the young gay/bisexual men in our community aged 18-29, can you name all of the different crowds or groups that are here? By crowds or groups, I mean cliques or any groups of people the get together on a regular basis. I’m going to write the list down as you say them.”

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

“So you listed [read list to person], now does any other group come to mind?”

Add to above list.

“Now what about the gay community in general? Are there any other crowds or groups you can think of?” Repeat until person can’t think of any more.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Go back over the groups the interviewer isn’t familiar with:

“I’m not familiar with that group, could you describe it more?”

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

“Now look over the list you gave me. What groups are you a part of?”

Check those groups he is a part of.

“Now I’d like to find out more about one of these groups. Could you pick the group you’re most familiar with and tell me more about it? Pretend that I don’t know anything about it.”

About how many young gay/bisexual men are in the group?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Where do they live?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
Who are leaders of this group?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What are the ages of the men in this group?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Do they identify as gay, straight, bisexual, queer, transgender, questioning?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What ethnic/racial groups comprise this group?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Is this group comprised only of men or of men and women or transgender women?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What does one do to join this group?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What do they like to do together? What do they like in general?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What do they dislike doing? What do they dislike in general?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What media does this group use or read (e.g., magazines, social network sites) that might be used to publicize Project?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Where do they meet or hang out?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
What other groups go to this place?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Do young gay/bisexual men frequent this space on particular days or times?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Is it a space where conversations can occur or written material can be distributed?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Can posters be hung up there?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Could young men be recruited for program activities there?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Other thoughts about the group of young men?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

[Repeat the interview with 2-4 groups, depending upon how long the interviewee takes to
describe each group. It is better to gather in depth information, so don’t rush the person
along. But if he only has a few things to say about a group, then ask about several groups.]

(continued on following page)
### Community Assessment Compilation Form

To be used after the interviews have been conducted. This form should be copied so that each group that is identified through interviews is described in a column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of men in group?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do they live?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are leaders of this group?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay, straight, bisexual, transgender?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/Ethnic background of group members?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men only, women also, transgender women also?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to join the group?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities they like to do together? Other things they like?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike doing what activities? Other dislikes of group?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media group uses (e.g., magazines, social network sites) that might use to publicize Project?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do they meet or hang out?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other groups go to this place?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hang out at space on particular days or times?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can conversations occur or distribute materials at space?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can posters be hung up there?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could young men be recruited for program activities there?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything else to add about group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community Assessment Interview for Community Leaders

**What this measures:** Information that the Project might need to know for implementation in your community

**Evaluation type:** Formative; also see Module 2, Community Assessment where there is more information about the use of the Community Assessment Interview

**Objectives:**

1. To learn about a variety of issues concerning young gay/bisexual men in the community.
2. To identify services for young men that the Project should refer young men to.
3. To learn about what has worked and not worked so well in the community with respect to reaching young gay/bisexual men.
4. To identify potential members for the Community Advisory Board.

**General Information**

Staff name conducting interview: __________________________________________________________

Date of the interview: ____ / ____ / ____ (month/day/year)

Individual being interviewed: _________________________________________________________

From what organization (if any): ______________________________________________________

Interview site/setting: ________________________________________________________________

**Demographic Information**

*Note: it is not appropriate to ask this personal information. If you know it, then go ahead and write it down. But DO NOT interview the person on this since we are not trying to find out personal information about the respondent.*

**Current gender**

- Male
- Female
- Transgender—male to female
- Transgender—female to male

**Identifies as:**

- Gay
- Bisexual
- Straight

**Ethnicity:**

- Hispanic/Latino
- Non Hispanic/Latino

*(continued on following page)*
Race: (Check all that apply.)
- [ ] American Indian/Alaska Native
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black/African American
- [ ] Native Hawaiian/

Age: ___________________________

Type of respondent:
- [ ] Community member
- [ ] Agency representative
- [ ] Business owner
- [ ] Clergy
- [ ] Health department representative
- [ ] Other (specify: ____________________________)
  Specifically, what is your job? ____________________________

(Remainder to take detailed notes as the person is talking so you can refer back to them.)

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. We are starting a new project for young gay/bisexual men in our community, and as part of our planning process we are gathering information about the community that will be very helpful to us. You have been identified as someone who is knowledgeable about the issues facing young gay/bisexual men or is knowledgeable about previous work with gay men.

Here is a brief description of the Project that we will be starting.

(Have a brief description figured out to tell him/her. Remember that this is a great opportunity to represent the Project in a positive way to the greater community, and to describe it as more than just an HIV/AIDS prevention project.)

Do you have any questions? ____________________________

____________________________________________________

What do you think about the sounds of this Project?

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

What do you think is currently going on in (name of community) with respect to young gay/bisexual men’s sexual risk-taking behavior?

____________________________________________________

____________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
Do you think very many young men are engaging in risky sexual behavior? Please explain:
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Do you think the rates of unsafe sex are increasing here locally, decreasing, or pretty much staying the same? ___
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

(Add more questions as desired, depending upon how much you think the individual you are interviewing knows about the young gay/bisexual men in your community.
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

We would like to better understand the history of attempts at working with young gay/bisexual men on HIV prevention here in the community. We would also like to know more about what community resources are available for young gay/bisexual men.

What groups/organizations currently work with young gay/bisexual men around here?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

What services do they provide young gay/bisexual men?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
Who provides HIV prevention education services to young gay/bisexual men in the community, and what is the nature of these services? (i.e., small group sessions, safer sex workshops, HIV 101 presentations, safer sex posters or handouts).

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

In your estimation, how successful have these attempts been?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What problems have they encountered?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Who has been most successful in reaching young gay/bisexual men in the community? 
Probe: (Why is that? What did they do or what do they currently do?)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Are there particular bars/cafes that have been willing to host HIV related events for the gay/bisexual community? Probe: (If yes): What is the name of the person should talk to there?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
Are there particular bars/cafes that HAVE NOT been willing to host HIV-related events for the gay/bisexual community? Since our Project really needs to work with bar owners and cafe owners (if there are any), can you give me any advice about how we might best work with them?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

What therapists/mental health professionals work with young gay/bisexual men? Who else should I interview that would be knowledgeable about these issues? Do you have their contact information?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

(You may want to describe the function of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) at this time. Remember not to promise inclusion on the CAB, as you may find the individual is not a good fit for position. To describe the CAB, you might start out by saying something like this.)

We are going to create a Community Advisory Board comprised of community leaders representing key sectors of the community (such as AIDS service organizations, the county/city public health department, social service agencies that work with gay/bisexual youth, local colleges and universities, gay positive faith-based organizations, and various communities of color).

The Community Advisory Board will serve as mentors to the Project by nurturing, supporting, and facilitating Project activities. (You may want to give them the attached job description for the Community Advisory Board). For future reference, is the Community Advisory Board something you would consider joining?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Thank you so much for your time. Don’t hesitate to call or e-mail me with any information you may have forgotten to mention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What this measures: Core Group process and goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Type: Process monitoring; also see Module 5, Core Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objectives:**
1. To record when and where Core Group took place
2. To examine what your Core Group process is
3. To record particulars about Core Group worthy of future considerations

---

**Date of CG:** ____________________________

**Location of CG:** ____________________________

**Names of MP project volunteers who participated in CG:**
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

**Estimated number from each racial/ethnic group:**
- ___Black/African-American
- ___Latino/Hispanic
- ___Asian/Pacific-Islander
- ___white

**Estimated segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community that attended:**
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

**Core Group agenda (attach).**

**Additions/changes made to agenda by CG/volunteers:**
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

**Actions implemented from this meeting:**
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

*(continued on following page)*
Was a community-building/icebreaker exercise(s) conducted at the meeting? What was it?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Was time spent analyzing an issue, such as about HIV prevention, testing, speaking with/encouraging peers, or an underlying issue (e.g., masculinity, internalized homophobia, family issues)? What was the issue? How was it discussed? Did this seem like a helpful group discussion?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Thoughts on process of Core Group meeting to consider for future groups?
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Agenda items for next CG: (new or unfinished business, including Project planning, brainstorming themes/ideas, house issues, etc.):
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Any other observations on CG:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Download this form as a Word document at [www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure12-6.doc](http://www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure12-6.doc)
Appendix
Module 12: Monitoring and Evaluation

Figure 12.7
Social Outreach Event Planning Form

What this measures: Who, what, where, when, and how an event is being planned

Evaluation type: Process; see also Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Teams

Objectives:
1. To stimulate the process of planning and enacting Mpowerment Project events
2. To identify all steps necessary in producing an event
3. To assign responsibilities and a timeline for accomplishing tasks

Background
The process of developing a social outreach event can be tracked using the following tool. This tool is helpful not only for collecting process data about the event, but also for making sure you are on track in planning and implementing it.

There are many issues to be aware of in setting up events, and this form will help you make sure that all issues are covered. We strongly urge the use of these forms for all large events, and for smaller events when possible. It is important to follow the Project’s Guiding Principles in planning for and conducting Social Outreach Events, remembering that planning and putting on events should be empowering for the Core Group and volunteers.

Overview
What is the event?
_________________________________________________________________________

Is this a one-time or recurring event? ____________________________________________

Who is chairman of this event? ________________________________________________

Date of event ______________ Time ______________

Location __________________________________________

Goals of Event
What goals are this event intended to accomplish? (check all that apply)

___ having fun/socializing
___ informing new men about the Mpowerment Project
___ promoting safer sex
___ promoting HIV testing
___ identifying men’s names for Mpowerment Project activities and volunteer work
___ other (describe): _________________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
Describe event:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

List the planning committees for this event
(e.g., entertainment, decorations, food, collection of names for M-groups, distribution of safer sex promotional materials, development of materials, etc.) and associated tasks. Also list the person who heads up each committee and its members.

Committee: ___________________________  Head:
Tasks:
Members:

Committee: ___________________________  Head:
Tasks:
Members:

Committee: ___________________________  Head:
Tasks:
Members:

Committee: ___________________________  Head:
Tasks:
Members:

Whose assistance or approval is needed in producing this event?
How will this be obtained?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

HIV Prevention at the Event
Will safer sex be promoted or HIV testing, or both? _______________________________
How will they be promoted at this event?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
Outreach Materials
What “party favors”/safer sex or testing promotional materials will be given out at the event?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
Who is responsible for designing those?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
Who will assemble the materials?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
How will those be distributed (and by who)?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Publicity for Event
How will the event be publicized? List each publicity strategy (e.g. flyers, ads, articles) and who is in charge of each:
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Refreshments
Will refreshments be provided? What? Who is responsible for them?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
Decorations
How will the space for the event be structured/designated?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Entertainment
What entertainment will be provided? Who is responsible for making that happen?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Mpowerment Project promotion
How will participants at this event learn about the Mpowerment Project and be invited to become volunteers?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
How will you get people to sign up for M-groups? Who will collect the names?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Empowerment of volunteers
What efforts will be made to ensure that as many young men as possible will provide input into the design and preparation of this event?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Budget
What is the budget for the event? How much money is allotted for each major category of expenses?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Download this form as a Word document at www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure12-7.doc
What this measure: Who, what, when, where and how outreach events occurred

Evaluation type: Process; see also Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Teams

Background
In Figure 12.7 we discussed how to evaluate the planning process for conducting a successful event. Here we are concerned with the particulars of how the event went. The following form should be completed following each event, especially larger ones.

This form is also designed to be helpful in thinking about and analyzing all aspects of how the event went, not just for keeping numbers. We strongly urge the Core Group to use this form for reviewing event successes and challenges. This is helpful so that planning for future events benefit from the experience of previous events.

Objectives
1. To record when and where the event took place
2. To determine who was reached by the event
3. To record particulars about the activity worthy of future consideration

Event name: _______________________________________________________
Date: _____ / ____ / ____ (month/date/year)
Start time: __________a.m./p.m.
End time: ___________a.m./p.m.
Location/Site name: _________________________________________________
Staff name or ID completing form: ______________________________________

Briefly describe event:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Number (and names) of Mpowerment Project volunteers who participated in formal outreach activities:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
(continued on following page)
Number (and names) of Mpowerment Project volunteers who participated in performance (if there was one):
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How many names of guys were collected for M-groups? ___________________________

How many men in target age range attended the event? ___________________________

How many new men attended the event? _______________________________________

**Ethnicity Breakdown:**
Estimated number from each racial/ethnic group:

___ Black/African-American
___ Latino/Hispanic
___ Asian/Pacific-Islander
___ white

Other genders who attended:
___ Women
___ Transgender

Age Breakdown (men) of attendees:
18-23_____ 23-26_____ 26-29_____ 30-35_____ 35+_______

What segments of the young gay/bisexual men’s community were reached? About how many men from each segment? What segments of the young gay men’s community were missing?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What safer sex promotional materials were distributed? How many?:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What HIV testing promotional materials were distributed? How many?:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

*(continued on following page)*
What were people’s responses to the materials? Did people take them? Did they look at them?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
How many condoms were distributed: ______________________________
Lubes: ______________________________

Was anything else included in with materials? (e.g., invitations to M-groups, invitations to other events, etc.)

What safer sex promotional materials were distributed? How many?:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Comments/feelings about this event (what went well, what could have been improved, what might you do differently next time):
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Social Outreach Event Participant Satisfaction Survey

What this measures: Participant feedback on outreach events

Evaluation type: Process: see also Module 7: Formal Outreach—Social Outreach Events and Outreach Teams

Background:
A one-page survey asking what participants thought of the event can be very helpful when trying to understand the extent to which an event was successful and why. A satisfaction survey can help determine if the event is worth repeating in the future. If the event was not a raging success, it may also provide suggestions on how to improve the event, or what other type of event might be offered instead. This sample Participant Satisfaction Survey could be distributed to men as they leave the event, or some time afterwards, for example to Core Group participants at a later meeting.

Event Satisfaction Survey

(continued on following page)
Event Satisfaction Survey

1. Age? ________________
2. What city do you live in? ________________________________
3. Were you born as a male or a female?
   □ Male □ Female
4. How do you view yourself now (i.e., what is your current gender)?
   □ Male
   □ Female
   □ Transgender: male-to-female
   □ Transgender: female-to-male
   □ Don't know
5. What best describes your race? (Check all that apply.)
   □ American Indian or Alaska Native
   □ Asian
   □ Black or African American
   □ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   □ White
6. What best describes your ethnicity?
   □ Hispanic or Latino
   If Hispanic/Latino, what is your ethnic group?
     □ Not Hispanic or Latino
7. Which of the following terms best describes you? (Check one)
   □ Gay □ Bisexual □ Straight/Heterosexual
   □ Other: ________________________________
8. I thought today’s event was:
   □ Fabulous □ Good □ So-So □ Poor
9. What was the best thing you got out of the event?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
10. How could this event have been improved?
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
11. What types of events would you like to see held in the future? (please give specific ideas if you have some!):
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
    ____________________________________________________________
Download this form as a Word document at www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure12-9.doc
**M-group Planning and Recruitment Form**

**What this measures:** Recruitment, scheduling, attendance and special circumstances surrounding planning for and running M-groups

**Evaluation type:** Process: see also Module 9: M-groups; Module 13: M-group Facilitator’s Guide; M-group Training Video

**Objectives:**
1. To review how the M-group went and reflect upon it.
2. To review how scheduling and recruiting is going (if a group was cancelled because of no-shows or insufficient men were scheduled, complete the second page only).
3. To consider who is showing up for M-groups and what groups of men are not attending.

**Background:**
The following tool can be used to help gauge the planning process for each M-group. This form is helpful for tracking how many men attended the M-group and providing information about the men who attended, as well as for collecting information about recruitment efforts. If the same person recruits for the M-groups and facilitates them, then that person can complete the forms. This part of the form should be shared with the co-facilitator to analyze how the group went.

If the facilitator is not responsible for recruitment, then the person who recruits should complete the second page and the facilitator should complete the first page. This information should be analyzed to consider how to improve recruitment efforts.

**Date of session and day of week:** ____________

**Time group started:** ______________

**Time ended:** ______________

**Total length of meeting:** ____________

**Facilitators:**
Who completed this form?
Facilitator: _____________
M-Groups Coordinator: _____________

**Attendance** (facilitator to complete):

____ total # of men
____ # new men
____ # “repeaters”
____ # men under 30

*(continued on following page)*
Ethnic background of new attendees:

- _____ # African American/Black men
- _____ # Latino/Hispanic men
- _____ # Asian/Pacific Islander men
- _____ # Native American men
- _____ # white men
- _____ # other (what: ________________________________)

Group Processes (facilitator to complete)

Anything unusual happen at this group session? If so, describe:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Comments/feelings/concerns about this group session?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Any ideas about how to do things differently in next session?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Scheduling (M-Groups Coordinator to complete)

How many men were scheduled for the group? ____________

How were men scheduled to attend group: _______________

Who did scheduling?

How was scheduling done?

When was scheduling done?

How many were previous “no shows”?

Comments on effectiveness of scheduling approach:
(e.g., what methods seemed most/least effective)

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

(continued on following page)
How were men reminded of the group:
Who reminded men?
When were reminders done?
How were reminders done?
Comments on effectiveness of reminders approach:
(e.g., how many messages were left versus actual conversations)

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

How many men who were scheduled did not show up?______________
Reasons given (if any) for no-shows:
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Plans to do Recruitment Differently:
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
M-group Evaluation: Participant Satisfaction Survey

**What this measures:** Participant thoughts about the M-group

**Evaluation type:** Process: see also Module 9: M-groups; Module 13: M-group Facilitator's Guide; M-group Training Video

**Background:**

The following evaluation tool can be used to help gauge what the participants felt about participating in an M-group. As you can see, the questions themselves are short and to the point. It should be distributed during the final section of the M-group and completed anonymously by the participants before they leave. The results of these forms should be reviewed by the Coordinators and used to provide feedback, both positive and negative. If M-groups aren’t assessed for outcomes, then this short form can be used instead of the other forms.

M-Group Participant Satisfaction Survey

(continued on following page)
M-Group Participant Satisfaction Survey  Please take a moment to rate how effective we were in presenting information to you today. Please rate each statement on a scale of 1-5, where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel that the role-plays increased my negotiation/communication skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand the importance of making safer sex decisions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I know how to use a condom correctly.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I plan to have safer sex the next time I have sex with someone who isn’t my boyfriend.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Any questions I had were clearly answered.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The group discussions were interesting and informative.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I know more about why it is important to get tested for HIV every 6 months.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. How would you rate the overall performance of the group leaders? *(Please circle a number)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Okay</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. What was the best thing you got out of attending this group?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

10. How can the M-groups be improved?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Download this form as a Word document at www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure12-11.doc
What this measures:
The pre- and post-tests assess if there are changes in behaviors and/or attitudes resulting from participation in an M-group. Two versions are included here, one that assesses changes from before to immediately after an M-group (which only assesses changes in attitudes and intentions) and the other that assesses changes 1 to 3 months after an M-group (which examines behavioral changes in addition to changes in attitudes and intentions).

**Evaluation type:** Outcome; see also Module 9: M-groups

**Objectives:**
1. To examine if there are changes in attitudes about safer sex and beliefs in one’s ability to communicate about safer sex and testing.
2. To examine if there are reductions in unsafe sex and increases in HIV testing.

**Background:**
A pre-test survey can be given to group participants immediately before the M-group is conducted. Some Projects might want to assess men immediately after an M-group. This enables you to look for changes in attitudes and intentions by comparing them immediately before and after the group; but of course there will not be time for men to change their sexual behavior. If it is important to look for behavior changes, then reassessing a month or more after the group is necessary.

Comparing the M-group Evaluation Pre-Test/Post-Test with the CDC’s Spot Survey

The CDC’s version of this form, called the M-group Pre- and Post-Session Assessment (found in the CDC Mpowerment Evaluation Field Guide at www.effectiveinterventions.org), is an alternative option for conducting outcome monitoring for the M-groups. It is longer than our survey. Besides what our survey assesses, the CDC version also collects information on HIV testing (e.g., last test, HIV status), medical treatment for HIV, the presence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the last 3 months, sexual activity in the last 12 months, informal outreach activity, exposure to Mpowerment publicity in the previous 3 months and condom use.

You can distribute the pre-test after the introductory remarks are made at an M-group but before you move into the icebreaker exercise. The pre-test and the icebreaker form could be distributed at the same time. You will need to say a little something about the pre-test/post-test. Even though the beginning of the pre-test describes how important evaluation measures are to the continuation of good programming, it’s a good idea to make a similar verbal plug here. To make comparisons in attitudes and behaviors from pre-test to post-test, the exact same survey items must be given to group participants at both times. If you are going to reassess men immediately after the group, then distribute the surveys right away once the group ends.

To assess longer-term outcomes of the M-group, you will need to mail out the surveys to men who attended the group or use an online survey method (such as SurveyMonkey). If you send out surveys to men by mail, be sure to include a postage-paid return envelope.

You should include a cover letter thanking them for their time and explaining to them, briefly, the importance of filling out the survey. Print the letter on festive paper to make it stand out more.

*(continued on following page)*
and increase its appeal. Men will be more likely to notice it and return it. To increase the percentage of surveys you get back, we recommend you call people or send them postcards as a reminder.

Using other forms of measurement that do not necessarily involve surveys can supplement M-group pre-test and post-tests. These can include process measures that document the number and type of safer sex materials distributed in the group, the number of men who attended the group together with their demographic information, and quotes from the M-group Evaluations.

Another source of input can be obtained from follow-up phone calls with M-group participants. This can be a time intensive task, so you likely would not want to call all participants, but only a random subset of them. During the phone call, you can ask participants what they got out of the group, how they think the group might affect their personal behavior, if they would be willing to invite their friends to the group, and if they’d like to get more involved in the Project. Generally though, you don’t want the group facilitator to be the same person who conducts the phone interviews, because that might bias the responses (group participants might be reluctant to tell the facilitator that they did not enjoy the group or did not get much out of it).

When used together, the different forms of assessment described above will create a fuller understanding of the M-group’s effectiveness. They can be used to support the claim that the Project functions as intended and is therefore achieving hoped for results.

**Topics to Assess if You Conduct a Post-Test Immediately After M-groups**

The 6 areas most likely to be immediately affected by participating in M-groups are:

1. Attitudes about the Enjoyment of Safer Sex Scale (question 13, a-c)
2. Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale (this concerns men’s feelings that they are capable of communicating with sex partners about having safer sex) (question 13, e-g)
3. Intention to have safer sex (question 13, h)
4. Intention to get tested every 6 months (question 13, i)
5. Intention to encourage friends to have safer sex (informal outreach) (question 13, j)
6. Intention to encourage friends to get tested every 6 months (informal outreach) (question 13, k)

The first 2 are “scales” to measure if men change in their attitudes about the enjoyment of safer sex and in their ability to communicate their desires for having safer sex. Scales are measures that are composed of a few questionnaire items that when combined measure something you want to assess. We have created a scale made up of 3 questions to measure “Attitudes toward Enjoyment of Safer Sex.” When the items are put together (we explain how to do this later in this module), a higher score on the scale indicates a more positive attitude toward enjoying safer sex than does a lower score. A different scale made up of 4 questions measures “Sexual Self-Efficacy.” Similarly, a higher score on this scale indicates that men feel more capable of communicating and negotiating sexual encounters than does a lower score.

We provide single items to assess intentions to have safer sex, to get tested every 6 months and to conduct informal outreach by encouraging friends to have safer sex and to get tested every 6 months.

*(continued on following page)*
Topics to Assess if You Conduct a Post-Test One Month or Longer After M-groups

The 6 areas that can be assessed longer-term after participation in an M-group include:

1. Attitudes about the Enjoyment of Safer Sex Scale (question 18, a-c)
2. Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale (this concerns men's feelings that they are capable of communicating with sex partners about having safer sex) (question 18, e-g)
3. Sexual risk behavior
4. Length of time since tested for HIV (question 13)
5. Encouraging friends to have safer sex in the past month (informal outreach) (questions 14 and 15)
6. Encouraging friends to get tested for HIV (informal outreach) (questions 16 and 17)

Measuring Sexual Risk Behavior

Questions to assess sexual risk behavior are also included in the longer term follow-up survey (questions 19-21). Please note: these questions only ask about sexual risk behavior in the past 2 months. If the follow-up survey is being given one month after the M-group, then the sexual risk behavior questions should be deleted because you will be assessing behavior that occurred prior to the group. Measuring sexual risk behavior in the past one month is not effective, because there may have been little opportunity for some young men to have had much sex.

Calculating Attitudes about the Enjoyment of Safer Sex and Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale Scores

First of all, the responses need to be rescored. As is, if all the scores were compiled with the exact numbers the respondents circled, a lower score would mean that someone feels able to always have safer sex or communicate sexual desires. Since we usually think of higher scores as being more positive, this would create confusion in discussing results. Therefore, all responses are “reverse scored,” which means that if someone circles a 1, they receive a score of 6. If someone circles a 2, they receive a score of 5, and so forth, as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial score</th>
<th>Reverse score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(continued on following page)
Scoring “Attitudes about the Enjoyment of Safer Sex”

After all responses have been reverse scored, they are averaged to produce a mean score for each person. So, to determine a young man’s mean score on Attitudes about Enjoyment of Safer Sex, first:

- Reverse score the responses.
- Then add up his numerical responses to all 3 questions and then divide this score by the number of questions that he answered.
- Even if some of the questions have been skipped (say he only answered 2 of them), sum the scores from the questions that have been answered and then divide by the number of questions answered to get a score.
- If a young man only answered 2 questions out of the 3, sum the 2 responses and then divide by 2.

So for an example, assume that a young man named Marco provided the following scores:

- Question 1, score = 4, reverse score = 3
- Question 2, score = 5, reverse score = 2
- Question 3, score = 4, reverse score = 3

You would then add these scores (3 + 2 + 3 = 8), and then tabulate the mean score dividing by the number of questions answered (8/3 = 2.67). Marco would have a score of 2.67 for Attitudes about the Enjoyment of Safer Sex, a scale that can range from 1 (does not believe that safer sex can be enjoyable) to 6 (believes that safer sex is very enjoyable). This would mean that Marco feels fairly neutral about safer sex being enjoyable—he doesn’t think it is terrible, but he also doesn’t think that it’s hot.

Scoring “Sexual Self-Efficacy”

You compute Sexual Self-Efficacy in much the same way. To tally results for the Sexual Self-Efficacy scale, reverse score the items as shown below. Then add the scores for each question and divide by the number of questions answered.

So imagine that Sammy completes the survey, and after reverse scoring, assume that for each of the questions Sammy gets the following scores:

- Question 4, score = 2, reverse score = 5
- Question 5, score = 4, reverse score = 3
- Question 6, score = 4, reverse score = 3
- Question 7, score = 3, reverse score = 4

You would then add these scores (5 + 3 + 3 + 4 = 15), and then tabulate the mean score dividing by the number of questions answered (15/4 = 3.75). Sammy would then have a score of 3.75 on his feelings of self-efficacy to communicate about having safer sex. Since a higher score means greater sexual self-efficacy (or an increased ability to communicate and negotiate about sex), a score of 3.75 means that Sammy experiences some difficulty in negotiating sexual situations. He may have a hard time maintaining safer sexual behavior in certain situations even though he knows how important it is.

(continued on following page)
Group Scores

You can tally a group score on each of the scales by adding the individuals’ mean scores and then dividing by the number of individuals in the group. For example, assume that eleven guys attended an M-group. Each young man had the following mean score for the “Attitudes about Enjoyment of Safer Sex” scale.

- Jimmy = 2.67
- Matt = 3.45
- Sandy = 4.35
- John = 2.50
- Doran = 4.00
- Terrance = 5.25
- Venton = 4.15
- Ivan = 4.25
- David = 3.70
- Jesse = 5.25
- Steven = 2.79

These add up to 42.36; divided by 11 men = 3.86. This group mean indicates that on average the men were slightly positive about enjoying safer sex, but there is certainly room for them to become more positive in their attitudes.

Changes Over Time

To look at changes from participating in the M-groups, you will want to see if the pre-test and post-test scores are different. If you are following participants, then you can match up the individuals’ scores and subtract the post-test scores from the pre-test scores. You can then average the scores across all participants to determine average change. Or you can simply average the pre-test scores together and compare them with the averaged post-test scores. We recommend doing this if you have had a hard time linking up pre-tests and post-tests from the same people.

The following are sample pre-tests/post-tests. Make sure that you have a way of indicating whether you are using them as pre-tests or post-tests. You might want to re-label them “Survey 1” and “Survey 2” since sometimes people become anxious whenever they see the word “test.”

(continued on following page)
M-group Outcome Evaluation: Pre-test/Immediate Post-test

Date:______________________________

Thank you for coming to an Mpowerment Project M-group. Please take whatever time you need to answer the following questions. Your honest answers will help us to secure funding for future events and continually help us improve what we offer you. In _____ months we will send you another questionnaire through the mail asking similar questions.

We have devised a code that allows us to keep track of surveys while at the same time honoring your anonymity. Please take the time to fill out this code. Start by writing down the first and third letters of your mother’s maiden name. Then write down the first and last letters of your father’s first name. Then write down the month and day you were born. (We promise not to try and “crack” the code!) The code should look something like this: dajs919.

CODE:________________________

1. Today’s date: ____/____/____ (month/date/year)

2. Age? ______________________

3. What city do you live in? ___________________

4. Were you born as a male or a female?
   □ Male
   □ Female

5. How do you view yourself now (i.e., what is your current gender)?
   □ Male
   □ Female
   □ Transgender—male to female
   □ Transgender—female to male
   □ Don’t know

6. What best describes your race? (Check all that apply.)
   □ American Indian or Alaska Native
   □ Asian
   □ Black or African American
   □ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   □ White

7. What best describes your ethnicity?
   □ Hispanic or Latino
   □ Not Hispanic or Latino

(continued on following page)
8. What is the highest level you completed in school? *(Check one)*
   - [ ] Some high school
   - [ ] High school degree or equivalency (GED)
   - [ ] Technical or vocational school
   - [ ] Some college
   - [ ] College degree (e.g., BA, BS)
   - [ ] Some graduate school
   - [ ] Graduate degree (e.g., PhD, MD, JD, DDS, MA, MS, MPH)

9. Are you currently a student? *(Check one)*
   - [ ] Yes, full-time
   - [ ] Yes, part-time
   - [ ] No

10. Which of the following terms best describes you? *(Check one)*
    - [ ] Gay
    - [ ] Bisexual
    - [ ] Straight/Heterosexual
    - [ ] Other: ____________________________________________

11. What is your HIV status? *(Check one)*
    - [ ] HIV-negative
    - [ ] HIV-positive
    - [ ] Prefer not to answer
    - [ ] Never been tested for HIV or never got results

12. Have you attended an M-group before?
    - [ ] No, this is my first M-group
    - [ ] Yes, one other time
    - [ ] Yes, two other times
    - [ ] Yes, more than two other times

*(continued on following page)*
13. How much do you agree with these statements?

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling the number which best fits your response to each item. Use this scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>Slightly</td>
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<tr>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b. Using a condom takes the fun out of sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Safer sex is unsatisfying.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. If I have sex with someone who isn't my boyfriend, I plan always to have safer sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. I plan to get tested for HIV every 6 months.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>j. I plan to talk with friends of mine to encourage them to have safer sex.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>

THANK YOU! (continued on following page)
M-group Outcome Evaluation: Pre-test/Longer-Term Post-test

Date:______________________________

Thank you for coming to an Mpowerment Project M-group. Please take whatever time you need to answer the following questions. Your honest answers will help us to secure funding for future events and continually help us improve what we offer you. In ____ months we will send you another questionnaire through the mail asking similar questions.

We have devised a code that allows us to keep track of surveys while at the same time honoring your anonymity. Please take the time to fill out this code. Start by writing down the first and third letters of your mother’s maiden name. Then write down the first and last letters of your father’s first name. Then write down the month and day you were born. (We promise not to try and “crack” the code!) The code should look something like this: dajs919.

CODE:________________________

1. Today’s date: ____/____/____ (month/date/year)
2. Age? ______________________
3. What city do you live in? ___________________
4. Were you born as a male or a female?
   □ Male
   □ Female
5. How do you view yourself now (i.e., what is your current gender)?
   □ Male
   □ Female
   □ Transgender—male to female
   □ Transgender—female to male
   □ Don’t know
6. What best describes your race? (Check all that apply.)
   □ American Indian or Alaska Native
   □ Asian
   □ Black or African American
   □ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   □ White
7. What best describes your ethnicity?
   □ Hispanic or Latino
   □ Not Hispanic or Latino

(continued on following page)
8. What is the highest level you completed in school? *(Check one)*
   - □ Some high school
   - □ High school degree or equivalency (GED)
   - □ Technical or vocational school
   - □ Some college
   - □ College degree (e.g., BA, BS)
   - □ Some graduate school
   - □ Graduate degree (e.g., PhD, MD, JD, DDS, MA, MS, MPH)

9. Are you currently a student? *(Check one)*
   - □ Yes, full-time
   - □ Yes, part-time
   - □ No

10. Which of the following terms best describes you? *(Check one)*
    - □ Gay
    - □ Bisexual
    - □ Straight/Heterosexual
    - □ Other: ____________________________________________

11. Have you attended an M-group before?
    - □ No, this is my first M-group
    - □ Yes, one other time
    - □ Yes, two other times
    - □ Yes, more than two other times

12. What is your HIV status? *(Check one)*
    - □ HIV-negative
    - □ HIV-positive *(skip to question 14)*
    - □ Prefer not to answer
    - □ Never been tested for HIV or never got results

13. How many months has it been since you were tested for HIV and received your test results? _______

14. How many times did you encourage a friend to have safer sex in the last month? _______

15. How many friends did you encourage to have safer sex in the last month? _______

16. How many times did you encourage a friend to get tested for HIV in the last month? _______

17. How many friends did you encourage to get tested for HIV in the last month? _______

*(continued on following page)*
18. How much do you agree with these statements?
Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling the number which best fits your response to each item. Use this scale:

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<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Please check the box next to each activity you did with your boyfriend/lover in the past 2 months.

- [ ] I did not have a boyfriend/lover in the past 2 months. (please skip to question 21).
- [ ] You put your penis in his ass with a condom.
- [ ] You put your penis in his ass without a condom and pulled out before you came.
- [ ] You put your penis in his ass without a condom and came inside him.
- [ ] Your partner put his penis in your ass with a condom.
- [ ] Your partner put his penis in your ass without a condom and pulled out before he came.
- [ ] Your partner put his penis in your ass without a condom and came inside you.

(continued on following page)
20. How do you and your boyfriend handle sex outside of your relationship?

☐ Neither of us have sex outside of our relationship
☐ He has sex outside our relationship.
☐ I have sex outside of our relationship.
☐ Both of us have sex outside of our relationship.

21. Please check the box next to each activity you did with a man in the past 2 months who was not your boyfriend/lover.

☐ I did not have sex with a man in the past 2 months who was not my boyfriend/lover (please end the survey now).
☐ You put your penis in his ass with a condom.
☐ You put your penis in his ass without a condom and pulled out before you came.
☐ You put your penis in his ass without a condom and came inside him.
☐ Your partner put his penis in your ass with a condom.
☐ Your partner put his penis in your ass without a condom and pulled out before he came.
☐ Your partner put his penis in your ass without a condom and came inside you.

THANK YOU!

Download this form as a Word document at
www.mpowerment.org/downloads/figure12-12.doc
What this measures: Information gathered through informal conversations with people on topics that concern the Project and its activities.

Evaluation type: Process

Background:
In discussions with individuals implementing HIV prevention programs, we have found that many individuals had anecdotal information. These might be opinions expressed by young men about the program or stories about how the program affected young men. These are not usually captured on surveys, but can be revealing about the impact the program has on men. You may want to consider “formalizing” the use of anecdotal information by systematically recording it.

Recording anecdotal information involves “retelling” an incident. For example, if while hanging out with friends someone tells you a story about experiencing an outreach event, jotting down that information may prove helpful later when trying to assess the overall impact of each outreach event. The systematic part of doing this means always writing it down, and perhaps setting up a system so that the Core Group does this too. The important thing to remember is that anecdotal information can be used to report to funders on the progress of the Project. Believing that funders only want to see numbers may prevent them from hearing “contextual information”—that is, information regarding the context of the event—which helps to build an overall impression of the Project’s progress. If you have the information, use it! Write it down! This is a free and easy method of collecting information.

While anecdotal information cannot be used instead of other more formal ways of evaluating the Project, it can be used to give the funders a fuller picture of the Project. Including quotes from Project participants or other young gay/bisexual men in the community are great ways to bring your progress reports to life and to provide concrete examples of your Project’s impact on the lives of young gay/bisexual men in your community.
Mpowerment Implementation Logic Model

Assumptions:
- Young girls and boys engage in high sexual risk-taking behavior because they:
  - Are not part of a constituency with power and influence
  - Feel development because of their age and their sexual orientation
  - Have peer norms around being sexually active

Long-term Outcomes:
- Increased job-seeking and self-employment
- Increased political involvement and self-empowerment
- Improved economic empowerment

Immediate Outcomes:
- Increased empowerment and self-worth
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Increased self-efficacy

Outputs:
- Participants engaged in health educational structures, such as workshops and seminars
- Participants engaged in health educational structures, such as workshops and seminars
- Community health workers engaged in health education activities

Activities:
- Community health workers engaged in health education activities
- Participants engaged in health educational structures, such as workshops and seminars
- Community health workers engaged in health education activities

Figure 12.14 Mpowerment Logic Model

Appendix
Module 12: Monitoring and Evaluation

Module 12: Monitoring and Evaluation

FIGURE 12.14
Objective

The M-group Facilitator’s Guide is meant as a training tool to teach new facilitators how to run M-groups. When running actual M-groups, the M-group Meeting Guide should be used instead.

What you’ll find in the Appendix to this module:

Figure 13.1 Safer Sex Guidelines
Figure 13.2 Negotiated Safety Guidelines for Couples
Before the meeting

Gather together all props and materials you will need during the group:

- Refreshments
- Music
- Ground rules sign
- Ice-breaker handouts/bag to pick from
- Pens for people to write with
- Name tags
- Role-play scenarios
- Safe sex guidelines
- Flip chart paper with ASS, DICK, MOUTH and HANDS written on different pull sheets
- Tape
- Marker pens
- “Mystery Bag” (Bag with a variety of dildoes- different shapes, sizes and colors and phallic shaped objects - Marge Simpson doll, etc.)
- Non-lubricated condoms for use in condom demonstration
- Gift packages (bags containing a large assortment of latex condoms, water-based lubricants, dental dams, condom pamphlet, safer sex guidelines, negotiated safety guidelines for couples (See Figure 13.1), oral sex pamphlet, HIV testing pamphlet, a local gay-friendly resources guide, candy and other fun items
- Pairs of condoms for boyfriend role-play (A grab bag with pairs of identical condoms. There should be the same number of condoms as group participants)
- Gifts for participants’ friends (Baggies with a few condoms, lubricant, M-group invitation, information about the Project)
- Pins (mini-buttons with Project logo)
- Interest sheets
- Evaluation forms

Make sure that whichever facilitator will be handing out or using a particular prop has the necessary materials conveniently accessible to him. Make sure you have everything you’ll need!
Tips for facilitators

We suggest taking a break prior to the meeting. Many facilitators have said that having a chance to unwind from the day, rest and psyche yourself up is a good way to prepare for a group. It is also helpful to be sure that you are completely familiar with the outline.

In order for groups to be most successful, the co-facilitators must work together as a team — assisting each other, supporting each other, playing off each other’s comments, etc. The co-facilitators might agree on a system of nonverbal communication for use during the meeting to signal to the other one’s needs and preferences.

Facilitators need a nonverbal signal to communicate two things:

“Help! Say something to get the discussion going.”

“We need to move to the next section.”

The facilitators should exude enthusiasm and confidence in the group’s activities.

Even if you personally hate to role-play, fake it! Doing so will put the participants at ease - reassure them by your demeanor that everything that happens in the group will be fun and/or meaningful for them. Also, be aware of your body language (e.g., how you are sitting, the position of your legs and arms, your facial expressions, etc.). Try to communicate that you are relaxed, interested, friendly and sensitive.

It’s very important to keep the group moving and not spend more time than is allotted for each section. There’s a lot to cover in each group; the facilitators should pace themselves and help each other keep within the allotted time periods.

It is very important not to spend too much time in earlier sections because the latter sections are the most important. The early sections build up to them.

The transitions between sections are very important to keep the group flowing smoothly. Memorizing the transition statements is a good way to accomplish this goal.

Memorizing the transition statements is a good way to keep the group flowing smoothly.

We offer text in this guide. It is not necessary to memorize the words or to say them exactly as written, but they can help as a guide and can show you how you can cover the material quickly.
Participants arrive

Participants arrive, get settled, and have snacks.

Give out ICEBREAKER FORM (See page 8) for participants to get started on.

[Facilitator Notes] The pre-meeting period can be very awkward and tense for some participants who don’t know anyone in the room or are nervous about what they’ve gotten themselves into by coming. Music and refreshments will help set a comfortable atmosphere. In addition, when the co-facilitators personally greet each participant and thank them for coming, participants will feel at-ease and welcome.

Give them the ICEBREAKER FORM, make small talk, introduce the participants to each other, invite them to have some refreshments, let them know where the bathroom is, etc.

This is the participant’s first impressions of you and the group: let them see that you are nice, friendly people; that you are organized (this is not the time for you to be doing lots of last-minute things to prepare for the group - everything should already be ready by this time); and that you are interpersonally sensitive.

Groups attract a wide range of participants who reflect the diversity of your community. Be sure that the setting is welcoming and inclusive of your community’s diversity.
Welcome to the Mpowerment Project

Facilitators introduce themselves.

What is the Mpowerment Project?

- Guys meeting guys
- Building a strong young gay/bisexual men’s community
- Protecting and supporting each other
- Inclusive of all gay/bisexual men, ages 18 – 29
- Having fun

Purpose of group session  [Say:]  “These groups focus on sex and relationships among young gay men today and how we can get what we want and help each other through these challenging times.”

Ground Rules  [Say:]  “We want to create a safe space tonight for us to talk about things we may not often get to talk about, especially with a group of guys we don’t know very well.”

Confidentiality  [Say:]  “While we encourage you to talk with your friends about what happens at this group, we ask you not to attach someone’s name to anything being said tonight. Identities of who is in the meeting should not be revealed outside the group.”

Use “I” Statements  [Say:]  Try to speak from your own experience. Be as personal as possible and feel free to say whatever is on your mind. That’s how we can learn from each other.”

Mutual Respect  [Say:]  “We’re here to support and learn from each other. Please don’t judge anything you hear someone else say, even if you disagree with him. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions and their own experiences.

Have a Good Time!  [Say:]  “Be creative and playful. Try to participate as fully as you can with each other.”

[Facilitator Notes]  This section is very important in setting the tone for the group. We have found that groups run most smoothly when facilitators are enthusiastic in describing the Project and the M-group. Since you are likely to be somewhat nervous at the start of the M-group, it is a good idea to have your opening comments very well-prepared and basically memorized so you aren’t stumbling for words. Ground-rules should be presented as guidelines for creating a comfortable, safe space for all participants—not as authoritarian, strict rules of behavior.
**Objectives**

- To introduce participants to each other.
- To help participants feel comfortable talking in the group.

**Icebreaker exercise**

**[Say:]** “Okay, we have a little game now to find out a little more about each other.”

- **Pass out** ICEBREAKER FORMS **to all participants.**
  - Ask them to complete the forms, if they have not done so already. Remind the participants that one of the 3 statements should be false.

- Participants put forms into hat.
  - Shake the hat so papers are mixed up.
  - One at a time, ask participants to pick out one form and read the name. That person then identifies self. *(Make sure to point out each person as they are introduced).*

- The three things are then read and the group decides which item is false. Pass the hat to the person whose name was drawn and repeat.

**[Facilitator Notes]** This section is designed to be both fun and informative and to “break the ice” to get group discussion flowing. Most participants will not know each other so they will be interested in hearing information about each other and learning about each other’s diverse experiences and interests. Make sure each participant is pointed out as their sheet is read so that everyone identifies the person’s name with his face and the facts about him. One goal of this section is to warm up the group and give them practice in having group discussion. Try to encourage real group discussion as the exercise happens. If someone reveals an interesting thing about himself during the exercise, feel free to ask him questions about it (For example, if someone says Amsterdam is his favorite place, you might ask “Have you ever been there?” If someone says he’s involved in theater, you might ask “where?” or “how did you get involved in that?” etc.). Try to get the whole group involved in deciding which of the person’s statements is false, rather than just the person who picked it out. As you know, more sensitive and personal discussions will come later to which you really need the participants to contribute.

This exercise provides a non-threatening opportunity for all of the guys to feel comfortable participating in a discussion. Humor is very helpful in breaking the ice. If you see an opportunity to inject humor into the exercise or people’s comments, please do it (but be careful not to say something that could be embarrassing to an individual). Also, give people feedback during the exercise. If someone reveals something interesting about himself, make comments like, “that’s interesting.”
To get started tonight, we’re going to play a little game.

First, write your first name here:

Next, we’d like you to write three things about yourself. Two of these items should be true and one false. It’s up to you which you tell the truth about. The group will later guess which item you are lying about.

* Your relationship status:

* Something you’re involved in now (an interest, hobby, job, etc.):

* A favorite place of yours:
Interpersonal issues

[Say:] “I’ve heard from friends that meeting other guys is really important to them and that they wonder what’s the best way to do this. They say that it is hard to meet guys and develop relationships.”

“One of the goals of this meeting is for us to help each other come up with ideas and options for us.”

“What are good ways to meet other guys?”

“What issues come up for you in trying to meet other guys and get involved with them?”

Group Discussion

[Say:] “It might be helpful to take some specific situations and hear from each other about how we might handle them. Since the club is a major meeting place for young gay/bisexual men, this first situation is about meeting someone in a club.”

“You’ve been in a club for about 30 minutes and you’ve had your eye on this very hot guy across the room from you. You notice that he also has been looking at you. It’s obvious that there is mutual attraction.

“What would you do?”

“How would you handle the situation?”

“How would you like someone to approach you?”

Ask for volunteers to role-play the situation in front of the group. (If the group seems reluctant to volunteer, the facilitators may do the first role-play).

After each role-play, ask the group these questions:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”

[Say:] “Okay, let’s try another situation. Can we get two more volunteers for this next situation?”

Objectives

- To provide an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts about problems meeting other guys.
- To bring the focus of the group to a more personal and self-disclosing level.
Read scenario to group. Assign roles to each volunteer.

[Say:] “You are Mark and you have started chatting with Kevin in a gay chat room. Nearly every time you log on, you see Kevin online. Mark always chats briefly with Kevin and it seems like the two of you get along really well. Mark is very attracted to Kevin and would like to get to know him better. Kevin has just signed on, and you want to meet him. What does Mark do?”

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”

Facilitator Notes: Meeting other guys and the problems associated with that are topics of interest for most young gay/bi men. Participants have a lot to say about this and will be very interested in hearing other guys’ comments—but the group may need some coaxing to get the discussion going. The facilitators may need to talk about their own experiences some to get the ball rolling. When people talk, give them lots of reinforcement—nod your head, express interest with your facial expression, make comments like “yeah, I know what you mean,” “that’s really true,” “I think a lot of people feel that way,” etc. Sometimes, this discussion can get too narrowly focused on issues like “where to go to meet guys” or “how to pick someone up.” Try to ask questions to broaden the focus if it seems to be getting too narrow or if people aren’t saying much. Good questions to ask are: “What are some other problems in meeting guys?” “What other ways have you found to meet guys?”

In this section, we gradually ease the group into doing role-plays. Notice that we start off discussing the general issue of meeting guys, then discuss specific scenarios and then role-play the scenarios (first with facilitators if necessary. Wait about a minute after asking for role-play volunteers. If no one volunteers, the co-facilitator should volunteer). Use your judgment in terms of how ready the group is to move on to each stage, but don’t rush them. Since these are the first role-plays, we want to make sure it goes successfully.

Note also that the two scenarios in this section are about meeting and getting to know someone. For some guys, picking someone up for sex is relatively easy; it’s forming a meaningful relationship that many of us have trouble with. Try to guide the discussion so that it addresses these more basic interpersonal issues, e.g., fear of rejection, lack of social settings for gay men, cultural differences.

Remember to give lots of praise and encouragement to people after they’ve done a role-play. Good questions to ask after a role-play are: “What did you like about XX’s approach?”, “What seemed to work well?”, “How would you have felt in XX’s position?” etc. Since the club role-play is pretty short, it’s a good idea to have two different sets of people role-play it. After discussing the first people’s role-play, you can say something like “Can we get another pair of people to try a different approach?”
Safer sex guidelines and HIV testing

[Say:] “So far, we’ve talked about meeting and getting to know other guys. And this leads us pretty naturally to our next topic — sex.”

“Let’s spend a little time now seeing if you have any questions or concerns about what is safe sex.”

“We have a list of safe sex guidelines that we’d like to share with you now and see what you think.”

**Safer Sex Guidelines** *(See page 12, or for a formatted version, see Figure 13.1 in the Appendix to this module)*

- Give out guidelines.
- Read each guideline, and ask “What questions or thoughts do you have about this guideline?”
- Allow time for people to think about the guideline and voice their questions. If no one speaks up, the co-facilitator should ask questions.
- For intercourse, ask:
  - *What about if you’re on top—is that safe?*
  - *What about if you withdraw before you come—is that safe?*
  - *What about other issues: piercings—avoid semen on fresh piercings.*
- Encourage questions.

Examples you can ask about to get things started: “What if you or your partner is on anti-viral medications and has a low viral load? Does that change what you think about the guidelines?”

“Some people don’t seem to think AIDS is that serious anymore. Do you agree? Why? How does that influence your sexual behavior?”

**Have a brief discussion.**

**Facilitator Notes:** This is the first time in the group that we talk explicitly about sex. It is extremely important that the facilitators come across as being completely comfortable discussing sexual issues. We have found that it is best for the facilitators to treat this very nonchalantly, as if it’s no big deal. Certainly don’t tell the group that this topic may be uncomfortable. Demonstrate by your example how to talk about sex naturally, positively and in a nonjudgmental way. The facilitators must exude confidence that the guidelines presented are the most up-to-date recommendations available,
based on the latest scientific knowledge. One facilitator will read each guideline (including the information in the parentheses) out loud and then ask “Does anyone have any questions or thoughts about that guideline?” Wait long enough for people to absorb the guideline and think about it.

If no one says anything after a while, the other facilitator can break the ice by asking some of the questions we know young men have (e.g., “What if you withdraw before you come?”, “What if you’re on top?”, “Is it safe to give someone a blow job if he doesn’t come in your mouth?”, “What about precum?”, “What if his viral load is low?”, “What about medical interventions (e.g. antiretroviral medications) after possible exposures?”, “How do you use the “vaginal” condom for anal sex?”, etc.). Hopefully, once the ice is broken, the rest of the group will join in the discussion. Sometimes in discussion, participants will make incorrect statements (i.e., you can get AIDS from kissing, etc.). It’s up to the facilitators to clear up these misconceptions. Do so in a polite but assertive manner. For example, say something like “A lot of people believe that but, actually research shows that it’s virtually impossible to spread HIV through kissing.”

The facilitators will need to be well-informed about the latest safe sex information. There are resources listed in the Mpowerment Project Training Manual.

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**Safer sex guidelines**

- Always use latex condoms for anal or vaginal sex.
- Use water-based lube (like Astroglide, Wet, or Eros). Using oil-based lube (like Vaseline) can break down condoms.
- Being the insertive partner – or “the top” – without using a condom is unsafe, as is being the receptive partner – or “the bottom.”
- It’s difficult to spread HIV through oral sex; to remain even safer keep your cum out of his mouth and his cum out of yours.
- Remember that alcohol and drug use can make it more difficult to stay safe.
- If someone is HIV-positive and has what is called “a low viral load,” that does not mean that the person is safe to have unprotected sex with.

*You can use oil-based lubricants with polyurethane condoms (e.g. Reality, Avanti).*
HIV testing

“Having safer sex and following the guidelines we just discussed is important, but it’s also important to get tested for HIV. Getting tested is important in preventing HIV transmission because it provides knowledge of one’s HIV status. The current recommendations are that sexually active gay/bisexual men should be getting tested for HIV every 6 months, or more if you have concerns about your HIV status.”

“Can anyone tell me what’s the difference between “getting tested” and “knowing your current HIV status?”

“The current recommendations are that sexually active gay/bisexual men should be getting tested for HIV at least once a year, or more if you have concerns about your HIV status.”

“What are some ways to get tested so that you feel more confident about being able to do it?”

- go to places that are accepting of young gay/bisexual men
- go with a friend or a few friends

“I just want to make sure that everyone knows what testing is about. If you get tested for HIV and you find out that you are HIV-positive, that means that you have HIV, or the AIDS virus. It does NOT mean that you have AIDS.”

“If you are HIV-negative, it can mean either that you do not have the AIDS virus - or it means that you may have HIV but it won’t show on a test right away because you just contracted HIV, the AIDS virus. So if you just had risky behavior, then you might have to get retested in a couple of months.”

“You can get tested in a lot of different places, and the places are supposed to keep your name confidential. Sometimes guys are afraid to go to places in their own neighborhood, because someone might see them. Other times guys would rather go to someplace in their own neighborhood than to go to an area where they don’t feel as comfortable. It’s entirely up to you.”

“You just go in, get your test in a private place, and the person who gives you the test will ask you some questions about yourself and what you’ve done sexually. This is just so that they can give you good counseling about how to reduce your risk. Sometimes you get the test results back quickly - say within 20 minutes or so. And other times you have to come back another time for the results. Some guys prefer it one way, and some guys prefer it the other. You can call ahead to the place to find out which way they do it - a rapid test or a regular test.”

“Does anyone know of good places to get tested for HIV?”

- How much does HIV testing cost?

“You should also call ahead to find out if testing is free. Sometimes there is a charge for rapid testing. We will be giving you a pamphlet about where you can get tested.
Additional Guidelines

(to be added to ‘gift bag’), and for a facilitator to bring up at any time:

✓ Don’t assume that your partner’s HIV status is the same as yours. Someone might say he’s HIV-negative without realizing he’s actually positive. Many men with HIV infection don’t know that they are infected. Or, you might think someone is HIV-positive when he’s actually negative.

✓ People who have been infected very recently (before they even know they’re infected) are most likely to pass the virus to others during unprotected sex.

✓ Having unprotected sex with a boyfriend isn’t necessarily safe. In some studies, over half of newly infected men got HIV from their boyfriends.

✓ Get checked and treated for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), like Herpes, Gonorrhea, Syphilis, Chlamydia. You should get tested for STDs at least yearly if you are sexually active. If you have multiple partners, then getting checked for STDs every 3 months is best. Having an STD can make it easier to spread or catch HIV. If you have HIV, having an STD can affect your immune system.

✓ If you’re sexually active, get an HIV test at least every six months --more often if you have concerns about your HIV status.

Make sure to mention the testing days and times at the space.

If you’re HIV+, seek medical care to find out about your treatment options. People in care do much better than people who are not.
An FAQ paper will be added to the gift bag

[Facilitator Notes] The facilitators will need to be well-informed about where to get culturally appropriate testing, and a pamphlet listing these places should be provided in the space. If men start discussing if you can have unprotected sex once you each know your HIV-status, it is important to point out that people can contract HIV and not know it for quite a while, a test won’t necessarily show that someone has HIV until they’ve been infected for awhile. In addition, people are at their most infectious time before they even can find out that they are HIV-positive. Hence although it is important to get tested, it is also best to have safer sex regardless of HIV status.

Make sure to mention the testing days and times at the space, as well as other places around town. Point out that a list of testing places can be found on the referral list in the space, and is posted on the referral board.

Again, any misconceptions about testing need to be cleared up by the facilitators.
How to have fun, hot, safer sex

Objectives

- To help participants think more creatively about safer sex.
- To give participants specific ideas on low risk sexual activity they can do.

[Say:] “We really want to encourage people to be creative in how they approach safer sex. Sometimes people aren’t aware of all the fun, safer things they can do. We’d like to do an exercise now to help expand your ideas about ways you can have hot, safer sex.”

Small Group Brainstorming

- Divide participants into groups of three or four. Give each group a marker pen.
- Each group picks a large sheet of paper with one of the following body parts listed on it: ASS, DICK, MOUTH or HANDS. (If there are only enough people for two groups, give them ASS and DICK and do HANDS and MOUTH as a large group.)
- Ask each group to brainstorm as many safe, erotic things you can do involving the body part. Be creative, erotic, and fun. Make it a hot action statement like “licking someone’s armpit.” Be specific!
- Groups go to separate corners of room and brainstorm.
- Each group selects a reporter who reports to the entire group what their group came up with. The large group may add any new ideas not mentioned on the small group’s list.
- If there are any body parts left over, the whole group can brainstorm about them.

Discussion

[Say:] “Do you see anything new you want to try out?”

“How do you feel about seeing so many fun, hot ways of having safe sex?”
This section of the group is usually a lot of fun for the participants. Participants seem to get the most out of this section when facilitators are culturally sensitive, very enthusiastic, and create a fun, supportive, and sex-positive atmosphere.

It helps when facilitators have all materials organized in advance (flip-chart paper with body parts written on it, marker pens, tape) and are directive in leading the exercise (divide people into groups, give them their body part, tell them how much time they have, tell them where to tape their brainstorming sheet, etc.).

It’s easy to waste time during this section with people fumbling or waiting around not knowing what they’re supposed to do. It’s up to the facilitators to provide structured guidance. During the small-group brainstorming, the facilitators should circulate to check out how the groups are doing and offer encouragement and guidance as needed.

Encourage the participants to be specific in describing sexual behaviors (e.g., “licking his armpit” versus “licking”). The more specific the descriptions are, the more the participants can learn to incorporate them into their own behavior, and the more erotic they’ll be.

When the whole group is brainstorming, be sure to give lots of praise and encouragement.

There should never be dead silence after a participant suggests something. Say things like “that’s sound fun,” “great idea,” etc. when people suggest something. Keep in mind that it takes courage to suggest a sex act that is unusual with a whole group of people listening; make sure that people feel rewarded and supported for their contribution.

At the end of this section, say some closing comment like “Wow that was great, you guys sure have a lot of good ideas. I can’t wait to find a partner to try out some of these!” Saving all the brainstorming sheets can be used to create a master list that will surely be interesting to read! You can also refer to the phrasing and terminology gathered in the master list when creating safer sex materials, that way, your safer sex materials will be using terminology that your community of young men use.
**Fun with condoms**

**Objectives**

- To make sure participants know how to use condoms correctly.
- To encourage participants to experiment with different types of condoms and lubes and find what they like best. How to use condoms effectively.

**15 minutes**

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**Say:** “As we’ve just seen, condoms are important toys for making many sexual activities safer, so now let’s spend some time focusing on all the things we can do with condoms – and make sure you know how to use them correctly.”

**Ask participants to divide into pairs.** Bring out the “Mystery Bag.” Ask each pair to reach into the bag and pull out an object.

**Pass out a bowl of condoms** and ask the pairs to pick a condom to put on their dildo as you describe the proper way of putting it on.

**Encourage people to ask questions** while you’re explaining the order of things to check and do:

- Check expiration date...
- open package carefully;
- unroll condom slightly;
- squeeze and remove air from tip;
- put at least one drop of lube in tip;
- if foreskin: pull it back before rolling on condom;
- roll condom down so that it covers the whole penis;
- apply water-based lubricant; (coordinators may want to mention not to use lube with non-oxynol-9 here)...
- have anal sex

After orgasm, hold base of condom and pull dick out before it goes soft; never reuse condoms.

**Say:** “Does anyone have any questions?”

**Pass out condom/lube gift packages** to participants. Have them open them and look at the contents. Describe the different types of condoms and lubes in the packages. Encourage them to experiment with the different shapes/types and see what they like best. Encourage them to try them out while masturbating.

**Say:** “Do any of you have any special tips or ideas on how to get the most pleasure with condoms?”

**Some points to make:**

- Condoms do slightly decrease sensation but that means sex can last longer, and one drop of lube in the tip will increase sensitivity;
- Point out the condom/lube pamphlet (example attached) in the gift package and encourage them to read it.
Objectives

- To have a brief time of relaxation.
- To provide a time so participants can get to know each other.
- Remember to turn on music!
- Mingle with participants. Make sure no one is left out.

[Facilitator Notes] This section should be fun and theatrical. When you pass around the Mystery Bag, make sure the rest of the group can see what’s happening. Let the participants joke around a bit with the various dildoes (the Jeff Stryker provides opportunities for endless jokes). Be sure to pass around non-lubricated condoms for the demonstration.

If participants picked out the Jeff Stryker or Marge Simpson dildoes, ask them if they’d like to use one of the more easy dildoes to put the condom on. Because participants will be very distracted during this section, make sure you have everyone’s attention when you demonstrate how to put on the condoms correctly. The other facilitator should be watching the participants to make sure everyone understands the demonstration and is putting their condoms on the right way.

When you give out the gift packages, describe the variety of things in them and encourage people to comment or ask questions. Most people will never have seen a dental dam before. Some may not know that condoms come in different shapes, sizes and colors. Be sure to encourage people to try out the different condoms while masturbating to see which they like the best. Encourage questions!

Take a break!

[Facilitator Notes] We have found that turning on the music right away really helps relax people and definitely changes the atmosphere of the room. Mingle around with the participants. The break period can be very uncomfortable for people who don’t know anyone in the group or have insecurities about being gay/bisexual. If someone seems left out or uncomfortable, give them extra attention: offer them refreshments, make small-talk with them, make an effort to draw them into conversations, etc. Resist the temptation to let the break go for more than 15 minutes - we have lots more to accomplish before the night is over! Encourage and engage. Don’t leave anyone out.
Objectives

- To discuss problems participants might face in trying to have safer sex with partners.
- To provide strategies participants can use in negotiating safer sex.
- To give participants practice in negotiating safer sex with partners.

25 minutes

Scenarios and discussions

Scenario 1

[Say:] “Now that we’ve talked about all these hot ways to have safer sex, let’s talk about how we can get someone to do them with us.”

“OK, here’s the scene:

[Say:] “You’re really excited because tonight is your first date with Jerry. You’re at home getting ready. You’re going to a movie. After the movie you’d like to invite him back to your apartment. You’d like to really get to know him better, and you’re also very open to the possibility of having sex with him if the chemistry seems right. But you want to make sure that if you have sex, it’s safe. What can you do before going out to make it likely that you will have safer sex?”

Possible ideas:

- Have condoms readily available next to your bed
- Carry condoms with you
- Avoid getting too drunk or too high
- Put some condoms in your glove compartment when you go out but don’t leave them there to bake during the day!
- Have condoms in fun places; under your pillow, on the coffee table, in the kitchen, in the bathroom
Scenario 2

[Say:] “Here’s another situation. This is a scene about having safer sex. Any volunteers?” (Use a different set of volunteers for each situation if possible)

[Say:] “You’ve had two dates with Matt and you like him a lot. You’ve kissed but have never had sex. Tonight you and Matt had dinner at your house and then watched a video. You’ve been cuddling and kissing for awhile. He’s starting to unbutton your shirt, and you’re both getting really turned on. He whispers to you that he wants to get fucked. You’d like him to and you want to use a condom. What do you do?”

After the scenario, have the following discussion:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”
  “What seemed to work well?”
  “How would you have responded?”
  “What might you have done differently?”

Scenario 3

[Say:] “Same situation. This time you want to fuck Matt but Matt resists the idea of using a condom. What do you do?”

After the scenario, have the following discussion:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”
  “What seemed to work well?”
  “How would you have responded?”
  “What might you have done differently?”

Scenario 4

[Say:] “Same situation. Except now you’re on the bottom and Matt wants to fuck you and he doesn’t want to use a condom. What do you do?”

After the scenario, have the following discussion:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”
  “What seemed to work well?”
  “How would you have responded?”
  “What might you have done differently?”
Scenario 5

[Say:] “Okay let’s focus on the situation that is actually the most common for young men to have unprotected sex—with a boyfriend. Since this is such a common situation, we’d like everyone to practice dealing with it. This time, we’d like to pair you up and have each pair go off and role-play, then we’ll come back as a group and talk about our experiences.”

“To pair you up, I’d like each person to reach in this box and grab a condom. It’s kind of like Noah’s Ark—there’s two of each kind of condom. Whoever picks the same type of condom as you is your boyfriend for the role-play.”

Pass around condom box. Read scenario:

[Say:] “Sean and William have been boyfriends for five months. They’re totally in love and have a very active sex life. They’ve agreed that it’s okay to occasionally have sex with others but don’t do this very often. They have never used condoms with each other. Sean is beginning to worry about this.

How could Sean suggest to William that they start using condoms?”

Ask pairs to go to separate parts of room.

When everyone has finished the scene, ask the group: “Does anyone want to tell us what their conversation was like?”

“What are some reasons that boyfriends may not have safe sex?” (e.g., fear of losing boyfriend’s affection, denial that HIV is relevant to them, pressure from boyfriend, feeling invulnerable, etc.)

“How can these be dealt with?”

Make the point: “Just because they have had unsafe sex for a while, all is not lost...you can start having safer sex at any time.”
[Facilitator Notes] This section is very important and can be very interesting for participants.

The success of this section will depend on how clear it is to the group what you are asking them to do and how comfortable they feel in responding. The first scenario (remember that this one is not a role-play!) is designed to get ideas about how people can set up a situation in advance that will make it more likely safer sex will happen.

We know that much of the prelude to sexual interactions is nonverbal and that people often don’t (and don’t want to) actually talk about sex before, during or after having it. So this scenario focuses on what they can do to set the stage for safer sex before the date even happens. Again, give lots of praise and encouragement to people when they give an idea. If participants are reluctant to say something, the co-facilitator can get the ball rolling by contributing an idea. It’ll be most helpful for participants to hear lots of different ideas, so encourage people to think creatively.

The role-plays about having sex are ordered in increasing levels of difficulty. In the first, Matt (the bottom) is willing to use a condom. In the second, Matt (still the bottom) is resistant. The third is more difficult because resistant Matt is now the top. It’s important to role-play each of these variations so the group can see the variety of challenges and options they may face. If necessary, remind the group that the characters in the role-play have known each other for a while and like each other and would like to continue the relationship. Oftentimes, participants take the easy way out by saying “if you don’t want to use a condom, then I don’t want to have sex with you anyway.” In real life, people’s motivations and desires are usually more complex. Help the group address the complexities of balancing protecting yourself and maintaining the partners’ affection. Again, give the role-players lots of praise and encouragement and encourage the group to really discuss the issues raised, and ideally give examples of how they would personally deal with them. If time permits, feel free to have more than one role-play of the various situations.

The role-play about boyfriends is very important given that boyfriend relationships are the most common context for young men to have unsafe sex. While the participants are role-playing, circulate around and help out if people are having trouble with the scenario and get a sense of how much time the participants need. Afterwards, when you discuss this role-play as a group, try to get each pair to say something about the approach they used and how it went. Again, it will be most helpful for people to hear a wide variety of ideas.

*Note to facilitators:* By this point in the group, you may be feeling tired. Nevertheless, try to sound energetic and interested, even if you have to fake the energy! Remember that the group participants haven’t heard any of this before and will still be interested.

Resist the temptation to start leaving out parts of the script to finish quickly. Praise & encourage!
Encouraging friends to have safe sex

[Say:] “Up to this point, we've been talking about issues related to our own behavior. Now let's focus a bit on how we can help our friends and our community. We've learned a lot about how to protect ourselves and how to protect others. However, we probably all have friends that we care about and we may not be sure that they are always being safe. We don’t want to lose them. Now that we've attended this meeting, we have an opportunity and the power to help our friends, so they don't have to deal with the difficulties of being HIV positive. We can help save our friends' lives.”

“It is extremely important that we do this because our friends will listen to us. And, unfortunately - as all the anti gay propaganda, gay bashing and battles over gay rights in our society show - not everyone cares about what happens to young gay and bisexual men, so it is up to us to protect our community.”

[Ask the group:] “What can we do to really encourage our friends to practice safer sex?”

[Ask the group:] “What are some good ways to approach our friends?”

1. Emphasize positive benefits of safer sex
2. Emphasize that being safe is “cool,” expected nowadays, and best for the entire young gay/bisexual men’s community
3. Use yourself as an example — don’t preach or be judgmental
4. Say “how to do it” — use yourself as and example

Group discussion/brainstorming of ways to encourage friends.

Facilitators may suggest specific things they could do or say to encourage friends.

Group problem-solving

[Ask the group:] “Can you think of any problems or difficulties that might arise in talking with your friends? What might those be? How can you deal with these?”

Objectives

- To help participants see the importance of talking with their friends about safer sex.
- To communicate the most effective ways for participants to talk with friends.
- To give participants practice in talking with friends.
Scenario and discussion

Scenario 1

[Say:] “It might be helpful for us to try acting out some ways we can talk with our friends. Would anyone like to volunteer?” (Role-play in large group).

[Say:] “You are at a dance with a gay friend. Your friend sees a guy who he thinks is very attractive. He tells you he’s going home with him. You want to encourage your friend to have safe sex.”

Have the following group discussion after the role-play:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”

Scenario 2

[Say:] “Okay, let’s try another type of situation. Who wants to volunteer?”

[Say:] “You and your friend are sitting at a cafe talking. Your friend is very sexually active. He’s just finished telling you about the latest guy he picked up. You’ve never asked him what he does sexually with the men he sleeps with, but you’re very concerned about him. What would you say?”

Have the following group discussion after the role-play:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”
This section is extremely important for many reasons. First, we know that not all young men will come to these groups or other project activities. The only way we may be able to reach those men is through their friends. Second, in order to truly mobilize the diverse young men’s community and create a norm promoting safer sex, it is critical that young men communicate with each other and encourage each other about safer sex. One’s friends are the most powerful sources of influence on young men’s behavior and attitudes. The more a young man hears his friends encouraging him about safer sex, the more likely he is to adopt it.

When introducing this section, it’s extremely helpful for the facilitators to emphasize why this is so important — that the participants have the opportunity to save their friends’ lives. You might mention recent anti-gay news stories and the fact that there are lots of forces out there trying to destroy the gay community and that it’s really up to us to take control to protect ourselves and our friends.

After you’ve introduced this section and explained why it’s important, ask the group these questions: “What can we do to encourage our friends to practice safer sex? What are some good ways to approach our friends?”

It would be useful to memorize these questions and say them in exactly those words, to make sure that the discussion gets off to the right start. During the discussion, encourage the participants to give lots of ideas of how they would approach friends.

The most basic guidelines are:

1. Don’t be judgmental.
2. Use yourself as an example.
3. Stress the positive benefits of having safe sex (Versus trying to scare your friends). Focus on how much they care about their friends and that’s why they want them to be safe.

This discussion can be very interesting and powerful for the participants since it deals with issues that are rarely discussed. Again, participants may sometimes take the easy way out by insisting that their friends are always safe.
The facilitators should not be afraid to challenge the participants by saying that we know from research that many young men are having unsafe sex, or that you personally know young men who are not being safe all the time.

Allow the discussion to continue long enough so that a variety of different approaches are mentioned and the basic guidelines listed above are mentioned before getting into the role-plays.

There are two different scenarios to role-play in this section. To get the message across, it’s important that the group does both role-plays, since they deal with different types of issues. If time permits, you might want to have more than one pair role-play each scenario. When discussing the role-plays, a good question to ask the group is “What did you like about his approach?”

It is extremely important not to go through the section too quickly. This is a critical element of the entire intervention: informal outreach participants can reach men who will never come to M-groups. This is why it is essential to go through the earlier sections in the time allotted.
Encouraging friends: giving out invitations and pins support your friends

Facilitator asks participants to each make a commitment to talk with friends about having safer sex.

[Say:] “One very helpful thing you can do for your friends is invite them to come to one of these groups. We have invitation packages (with lubricant and a couple of condoms) here that we'd like you to give to several of your friends.

“Also, we have pins that you can wear to express your support for building a healthy local young men's community. And this can be the start of building an entire community of young men here in our area—we—all of us who have been here tonight—are in the position of saving lives, and helping our community grow! So, it's incredibly important and urgent that each one of us commit ourselves to talking with and handing these invitation packets out to at least a few of our friends!”

“Also, we have pins that you can wear to express your support for building healthy local young men's community. These may also trigger discussions with your friends and other people you meet about this Project and safe sex.”

(Give out pins.)

“If you feel good about what we're trying to do here with this Project we'd appreciate it if you could wear this button occasionally and let other people know about us.”

[Facilitator Notes] We have found that this section works best when the facilitators start by explaining that inviting one's friends to come to these groups would be very helpful. Ask participants to think of specific people they could invite and then pass around the invitations to give to their friends. Let the participants take as many invitations as they want. Tell them you are really counting on them to do this. Next, give out the pins and explain why it would be helpful for participants to wear them: as a show of support for the Project and as a way of triggering conversations with friends about the Project and safer sex. Again, communicate to the participants that you’d really appreciate it if they could wear the pins.
Invitation to become involved

Invite participation in the Project

[Say:] “We’re very excited about the Mpowerment Project and we’d love for each of you to continue being involved. We have lots of different ways in which you can be involved.”

Describe possible ways of getting involved:

- Help create outreach events
- Announce upcoming events and pass out calendar

Volunteer in other ways:

- Outreach team (bar zaps, performance skits)
- Community Center (mailings, computer stuff, cleaning)
- Graphic design (materials development)
- Events committee
- M-group recruitment

Join the Core Group - the group that plans and runs the Project activities.

Interest sheets

[Say:] “We’d also like to have a way to get in touch with you, so please also provide your name, phone number, email address, and mailing address (discretion is assured).”
Thank you and evaluations

Thank participants for attending the group. Facilitators express personal feelings about their own experience tonight and what they got out of it.

Invite participants to share their reactions. Pass out the evaluation forms.

[Facilitator Notes] Hopefully, by this point the participants will have had such a good time in the group that they are anxious to get more involved with the Mpowerment Project. The facilitators should express a great deal of enthusiasm about the activities of the Project and communicate that we’d love for them to get involved in any way that they would like.

Announce any upcoming events and briefly describe the variety of ways they can be involved with the Project as follows (attending social events, planning events, outreach team, office volunteer, etc.). Emphasize the fun, social aspects of the Project. It would be helpful for the facilitators to say something about why they enjoy being involved.

To close the group, facilitators should thank everyone for attending and let them know you’ve enjoyed being in the group with them. Any other personal feelings or reflections about the group would be nice too. Tell them you would really appreciate hearing their feedback about the group. Pass out evaluation forms. Show them the box to put their completed forms in. Announce that everyone is welcome to stick around and have refreshments, talk, look over materials in the center, etc. Turn on the music to create a more casual, relaxed atmosphere.

After the group

Fill out the M-GROUP ATTENDANCE LOG (Module 9: M-groups, Figure 9.5) immediately after the participants have left. After each group, it’s helpful for the facilitators to talk over their feelings about how the group went — what went well, what should be done differently next time, any special issues that came up, etc. Share your experience as facilitator and your enthusiasm about the Project.
Informal socializing

**Turn on music!**

Invite participants to stay and talk, have refreshments, look over materials, hang out and talk, etc.

Make sure no one is left out of socializing.

Give out materials, show guys around the house.

Remember that one of the biggest motivations to come to an M-group is to meet guys and have fun. So, turn on the music and have some fun after all that hard work!

It would be best if participants could hang around the center for at least 20-30 minutes if they want. Sometimes participants have hung around and talked about issues that come up in M-groups late into the night. Some Projects schedule outreach events (e.g., video nights, discussion groups) so that after the M-groups are over there is something else that the participants can join right away. Other Projects have encouraged M-group participants to go to a café after the group so they can continue socializing. Either way, for a lot of guys this is the first real interaction they have had with the Project. Make it a good one!
Safer sex guidelines

- Always use latex condoms for anal or vaginal sex.
- Use water-based lube (like Astroglide, Wet, or Eros). Using oil-based lube (like Vaseline) can break down condoms.
- Being the insertive partner – or “the top” – without using a condom is unsafe, as is being the receptive partner – or “the bottom.”
- It’s difficult to spread HIV through oral sex; to remain even safer keep your cum out of his mouth and his cum out of yours.
- Remember that alcohol and drug use can make it more difficult to stay safe.
- If someone is HIV-positive and has what is called “a low viral load,” that does not mean that the person is safe to have unprotected sex with.

*You can use oil-based lubricants with polyurethane condoms (e.g. Reality, Avanti).
Lots of guys in same-sex marriages or other committed relationships eventually confront the question: “Can we, should we have sex without condoms?”

If one partner is HIV negative and the other HIV positive, the obvious answer is “No.” If both are positive it’s important to realize that getting an STD can result in an increased viral load, so condoms can help you take care of your immune system. It is also possible to pass different HIV strains to each other (that could be resistant to treatment).

But what if both guys are HIV negative?

Anal sex without condoms is an option some long-term couples are choosing. It’s an important option for gay men to have. But it’s definitely not for everyone. For many couples, continuing to use condoms is the best choice. Some research has shown that half of all men who get HIV get it from a boyfriend. So there are real risks, and it shouldn’t be taken lightly. At the same time we realize that it’s important for gay and bi men to be able to build trusting, lasting relationships. Ultimately, you have to weigh the risks and the benefits and decide what is best for you.

If you do decide to stop using condoms in a long-term relationship, here are some ways to reduce your risk:

**Step 1** Coming to this place in your relationship often means that you have been together for years, not months. This has given both of you time to REALLY get to know each other through the good times and bad. **Talk about this decision** and what it means for your relationship. Why does each of you want to do this? What do you need from your partner to feel secure about eliminating condoms?

**Step 2** Both of you get tested for HIV together. Make a date of it. If you both test negative, keep using condoms with each other and in any sex outside the relationship. Keep up the dialogue about how you’re going to make this decision a success. If one of you tests HIV-positive, then there are lots of things you can do to keep healthy – you might want to seek out support for how to deal with this emotionally, and you need to be supportive of each other while you or your partner meet with a health care provider to find out about treatment.

**Step 3** If you both test HIV-negative, **after 3 months get tested again**. If both of you are still negative, you’re good to go on the final step.

**Step 4** **Come to a clear understanding** about sex inside and outside your relationship. Having a clear understanding means that you have talked about it a lot, and you’re certain you agree on the exact same rules. You can’t be guessing about the agreements you have with your partner. Some agreements include: (a) no anal sex outside the relationship, or (b) no sex outside the relationship. Again, this has to be a real discussion about what you both agreed to do.

**Step 5** **If you slip up and break the agreement, promise to tell your boyfriend about it immediately.** Not everything always goes as planned, and one or both of you may slip up. If this happens, it doesn’t necessarily mean the relationship is over. But you’ve got to be honest about it. Your partner’s health depends on it. If the slip involved unprotected sex, you’ll definitely want to start using condoms again and go back to step 1 and get retested for HIV. For some couples, seeing a counselor can help prevent future slipups. Or maybe you will decide that it’s better for your relationship to keep using condoms. That’s a good choice for many couples. Your relationship can still be strong and fun and sexy, but by using condoms with each other you’ll know you’re keeping yourself and your partner safe.
Core Elements

1 Coordinator(s)
2 Core Group & other volunteers
3 Project Space
4 Formal Outreach (including Social Outreach Events & Outreach Teams)
5 M-groups
6 Informal Outreach (which is a focus on talking with & encouraging friends & acquaintances to be safe & get tested for HIV)
7 Publicity campaign
8 Community Advisory Board (optional)

Guiding Principles

Social focus
Empowerment philosophy
Peer Influence of safer sex messages
Multi-level approach
Gay-positive/sex-positive
Community-building
Diffusion of innovations

Together creating community for friendship for health for life
Together
creating community
for friendship
for health
for life

mpowerment.org
The Center for AIDS Prevention Studies
University of California, San Francisco
50 Beale Street, Suite 1300
San Francisco, CA 94105
415.597.9306

Download a PDF of Module 13: M-group Facilitator’s Guide at,
M-group Meeting Guide

Objective

The M-group Meeting Guide contains an abbreviated outline of the M-groups. It is a helpful tool to use while actually running the M-groups.
mPowerment
Welcome to the Mpowerment Project

Facilitators introduce themselves.

What is the Mpowerment Project?

- Guys meeting guys
- Building a strong young gay/bisexual men's community
- Protecting and supporting each other
- Inclusive of all gay/bisexual men, ages 18 – 29
- Having fun

Purpose of group session  [Say:]  “These groups focus on sex and relationships among young gay men today and how we can get what we want and help each other through these challenging times”.

Ground Rules  [Say:]  “We want to create a safe space tonight for us to talk about things we may not often get to talk about, especially with a group of guys we don’t know very well”.

Confidentiality  [Say:]  “While we encourage you to talk with your friends about what happens at this group, we ask you not to attach someone’s name to anything being said tonight. Identities of who is in the meeting should not be revealed outside the group.

Use “I” Statements  [Say:]  Try to speak from your own experience. Be as personal as possible and feel free to say whatever is on your mind. That’s how we can learn from each other.

Mutual Respect  [Say:]  “We’re here to support and learn from each other. Please don’t judge anything you hear someone else say, even if you disagree with him. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions and their own experiences.

Have a Good Time!  [Say:]  “Be creative and playful. Try to participate as fully as you can with each other.  

[Facilitator Notes]  This section is very important in setting the tone for the group. We have found that groups run most smoothly when facilitators are enthusiastic in describing the Project and the M-group. Since you are likely to be somewhat nervous at the start of the M-group, it is a good idea to have your opening comments very well-prepared and basically memorized so you aren’t stumbling for words. Ground-rules should be presented as guidelines for creating a comfortable, safe space for all participants—not as authoritarian, strict rules of behavior.
Introduction of participants

Objectives

- To introduce participants to each other.
- To help participants feel comfortable talking in the group.

Icebreaker exercise

【Say:】 “Okay, we have a little game now to find out a little more about each other.”

- Pass out ICEBREAKER FORMS to all participants. Ask them to complete the forms, if they have not done so already. Remind the participants that one of the 3 statements should be false.

- Participants put forms into hat. Shake the hat so papers are mixed up. One at a time, ask participants to pick out one form and read the name. That person then identifies self. (Make sure to point out each person as they are introduced).

- The three things are then read and the group decides which item is false. Pass the hat to the person whose name was drawn and repeat.
Interpersonal issues

Objectives

- To provide an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts about problems meeting other guys.
- To bring the focus of the group to a more personal and self-disclosing level.

[Say:] “I’ve heard from friends that meeting other guys is really important to them and that they wonder what’s the best way to do this. They say that it is hard to meet guys and develop relationships.”

“One of the goals of this meeting is for us to help each other come up with ideas and options for us.”

“What are good ways to meet other guys?”

“What issues come up for you in trying to meet other guys and get involved with them?”

Group Discussion

[Say:] “It might be helpful to take some specific situations and hear from each other about how we might handle them. Since the club is a major meeting place for young gay/bisexual men, this first situation is about meeting someone in a club.”

“You’ve been in a club for about 30 minutes and you’ve had your eye on this very hot guy across the room from you. You notice that he also has been looking at you. It’s obvious that there is mutual attraction.

“What would you do?”

“How would you handle the situation?”

“How would you like someone to approach you?”

Ask for volunteers to role-play the situation in front of the group. (If the group seems reluctant to volunteer, the facilitators may do the first role-play).

After each role-play, ask the group these questions:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”

[Say:] “Okay, let’s try another situation. Can we get two more volunteers for this next situation?”
Read scenario to group. Assign roles to each volunteer.

[Say:] “You are Mark and you have started chatting with Kevin in a gay chat room. Nearly every time you log on, you see Kevin online. Mark always chats briefly with Kevin and it seems like the two of you get along really well. Mark is very attracted to Kevin and would like to get to know him better. Kevin has just signed on, and you want to meet him. What does Mark do?”

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”

Safer sex guidelines and HIV testing

[Say:] “So far, we’ve talked about meeting and getting to know other guys. And this leads us pretty naturally to our next topic – sex.”

“Let’s spend a little time now seeing if you have any questions or concerns about what is safe sex.”

“We have a list of safe sex guidelines that we’d like to share with you now and see what you think.”

Safer Sex Guidelines

- Give out guidelines.
- Read each guideline, and ask “What questions or thoughts do you have about this guideline?”
- Allow time for people to think about the guideline and voice their questions. If no one speaks up, the co-facilitator should ask questions.
- For intercourse, ask: What about if you’re on top—is that safe? What about if you withdraw before you come—is that safe? What about other issues: piercings—avoid semen on fresh piercings.
- Encourage questions.

Examples you can ask about to get things started: “What if you or your partner is on anti-viral medications and has a low viral load? Does that change what you think about the guidelines?”

“Some people don’t seem to think AIDS is that serious anymore. Do you agree? Why? How does that influence your sexual behavior?”

Have a brief discussion.
HIV testing

[Say:] “Having safer sex and following the guidelines we just discussed is important, but it’s also important to get tested for HIV. Getting tested is important in preventing HIV transmission because it provides knowledge of one’s HIV status. The current recommendations are that sexually active gay/bisexual men should be getting tested for HIV every 6 months, or more if you have concerns about your HIV status.”

“Can anyone tell me what’s the difference between “getting tested” and “knowing your current HIV status?”

[Say:] “The current recommendations are that sexually active gay/bisexual men should be getting tested for HIV at least once a year, or more if you have concerns about your HIV status.”

[Say:] “What are some ways to get tested so that you feel more confident about being able to do it?”
- go to places that are accepting of young gay/bisexual men
- go with a friend or a few friends

[Say:] “I just want to make sure that everyone knows what testing is about. If you get tested for HIV and you find out that you are HIV-positive, that means that you have HIV, or the AIDS virus. It does NOT mean that you have AIDS.”

“If you are HIV-negative, it can mean either that you do not have the AIDS virus – or it means that you may have HIV but it won’t show on a test right away because you just contracted HIV, the AIDS virus. So if you just had risky behavior, then you might have to get retested in a couple of months.”

“You can get tested in a lot of different places, and the places are supposed to keep your name confidential. Sometimes guys are afraid to go to places in their own neighborhood, because someone might see them. Other times guys would rather go to someplace in their own neighborhood than to go to an area where they don’t feel as comfortable. It’s entirely up to you.”

“You just go in, get your test in a private place, and the person who gives you the test will ask you some questions about yourself and what you’ve done sexually. This is just so that they can give you good counseling about how to reduce your risk. Sometimes you get the test results back quickly – say within 20 minutes or so. And other times you have to come back another time for the results. Some guys prefer it one way, and some guys prefer it the other. You can call ahead to the place to find out which way they do it – a rapid test or a regular test.”

[Say:] “Does anyone know of good places to get tested for HIV?”
- How much does HIV testing cost?

[Say:] “You should also call ahead if testing is free. Sometimes there is a charge for rapid testing. We will be giving you a pamphlet about where you can get tested.
How to have fun, hot, safer sex

Objectives
- To help participants think more creatively about safer sex.
- To give participants specific ideas on low risk sexual activity they can do.

[Say:] “We really want to encourage people to be creative in how they approach safer sex. Sometimes people aren’t aware of all the fun, safer things they can do. We’d like to do an exercise now to help expand your ideas about ways you can have hot, safer sex.”

Small Group Brainstorming
- Divide participants into groups of three or four. Give each group a marker pen.
- Each group picks a large sheet of paper with one of the following body parts listed on it: ASS, DICK, MOUTH or HANDS. (If there are only enough people for two groups, give them ASS and DICK and do HANDS and MOUTH as a large group.)
- Ask each group to brainstorm as many safe, erotic things you can do involving the body part. Be creative, erotic, and fun. Make it a hot action statement like “licking someone’s armpit.” Be specific!
- Groups go to separate corners of room and brainstorm.
- Each group selects a reporter who reports to the entire group what their group came up with. The large group may add any new ideas not mentioned on the small group’s list.
- If there are any body parts left over, the whole group can brainstorm about them.

Discussion
[Say:] “Do you see anything new you want to try out?”

“How do you feel about seeing so many fun, hot ways of having safe sex?”
Fun with condoms

[Say:] “As we’ve just seen, condoms are important toys for making many sexual activities safer, so now let’s spend some time focusing on all the things we can do with condoms – and make sure you know how to use them correctly.”

**Ask participants to divide into pairs.** Bring out the “Mystery Bag.” Ask each pair to reach into the bag and pull out an object.

**Pass out a bowl of condoms** and ask the pairs to pick a condom to put on their dildo as you describe the proper way of putting it on.

**Encourage people to ask questions** while you’re explaining the order of things to check and do:

- Check expiration date...
- open package carefully;
- unroll condom slightly;
- squeeze and remove air from tip;
- put at least one drop of lube in tip;
- if foreskin: pull it back before rolling on condom;
- roll condom down so that it covers the whole penis;
- apply water-based lubricant; (coordinators may want to mention not to use lube with non-oxynol-9 here)...
- have anal sex.

After orgasm, hold base of condom and pull dick out before it goes soft; never reuse condoms.

[Say:] “Does anyone have any questions?”

**Pass out condom/lube gift packages** to participants. Have them open them and look at the contents. Describe the different types of condoms and lubes in the packages. Encourage them to experiment with the different shapes/types and see what they like best. Encourage them to try them out while masturbating.

[Say:] “Do any of you have any special tips or ideas on how to get the most pleasure with condoms?”

**Some points to make:**

- Condoms do slightly decrease sensation but that means sex can last longer, and one drop of lube in the tip will increase sensitivity;

- Point out the condom/lube pamphlet (example attached) in the gift package and encourage them to read it.
**Take a break!**

**Objectives**

- To have a brief time of relaxation.
- To provide a time so participants can get to know each other.
- Remember to turn on music!
- Mingle with participants. Make sure no one is left out.

**[Facilitator Notes]** We have found that turning on the music right away really helps relax people and definitely changes the atmosphere of the room. Mingle around with the participants. The break period can be very uncomfortable for people who don’t know anyone in the group or have insecurities about being gay/bisexual. If someone seems left out or uncomfortable, give them extra attention: offer them refreshments, make small-talk with them, make an effort to draw them into conversations, etc. Resist the temptation to let the break go for more than 15 minutes - we have lots more to accomplish before the night is over! Encourage and engage. Don’t leave anyone out.
Negotiating safer sex interactions

Scenarios and Discussions

Objectives

- To discuss problems participants might face in trying to have safer sex with partners.
- To provide strategies participants can use in negotiating safer sex.
- To give participants practice in negotiating safer sex with partners.

Scenario 1

[Say:] “Now that we've talked about all these hot ways to have safer sex, let’s talk about how we can get someone to do them with us.”

“OK, here’s the scene:

[Say:] “You’re really excited because tonight is your first date with Jerry. You’re at home getting ready. You're going to a movie. After the movie you’d like to invite him back to your apartment. You'd like to really get to know him better, and you’re also very open to the possibility of having sex with him if the chemistry seems right. But you want to make sure that if you have sex, it's safe. What can you do before going out to make it likely that you will have safer sex?”

Possible ideas:

- Have condoms readily available next to your bed.
- Carry condoms with you.
- Avoid getting too drunk or too high.
- Put some condoms in your glove compartment when you go out but don’t leave them there to bake during the day!
- Have condoms in fun places; under your pillow, on the coffee table, in the kitchen, in the bathroom.
Scenario 2

[Say:] “Here’s another situation. This is a scene about having safer sex. Any volunteers?” (Use a different set of volunteers for each situation if possible)

[Say:] “You’ve had two dates with Matt and you like him a lot. You’ve kissed but have never had sex. Tonight you and Matt had dinner at your house and then watched a video. You’ve been cuddling and kissing for awhile. He’s starting to unbutton your shirt, and you’re both getting really turned on. He whispers to you that he wants to get fucked. You’d like him to and you want to use a condom. What do you do?”

After the scenario, have the following discussion:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”

Scenario 3

[Say:] “Same situation. This time you want to fuck Matt but Matt resists the idea of using a condom. What do you do?”

After the scenario, have the following discussion:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”

Scenario 4

[Say:] “Same situation. Except now you’re on the bottom and Matt wants to fuck you and he doesn’t want to use a condom. What do you do?”

After the scenario, have the following discussion:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”
Scenario 5

[Say:] “Okay let’s focus on the situation that is actually the most common for young men to have unprotected sex— with a boyfriend. Since this is such a common situation, we’d like everyone to practice dealing with it. This time, we’d like to pair you up and have each pair go off and role-play, then we’ll come back as a group and talk about our experiences.”

“To pair you up, I’d like each person to reach in this box and grab a condom. It’s kind of like Noah’s Ark—there’s two of each kind of condom. Whoever picks the same type of condom as you is your boyfriend for the role-play.”

Pass around condom box. Read scenario:

[Say:] “Sean and William have been boyfriends for five months. They’re totally in love and have a very active sex life. They’ve agreed that it’s okay to occasionally have sex with others but don’t do this very often. They have never used condoms with each other. Sean is beginning to worry about this.

How could Sean suggest to William that they start using condoms?”

Ask pairs to go to separate parts of room.

When everyone has finished the scene, ask the group: “Does anyone want to tell us what their conversation was like?”

“What are some reasons that boyfriends may not have safe sex?” (e.g., fear of losing boyfriend’s affection, denial that HIV is relevant to them, pressure from boyfriend, feeling invulnerable, etc.)

“How can these be dealt with?”

Make the point: “Just because they have had unsafe sex for a while, all is not lost…you can start having safer sex at any time.”
Encouraging friends to have safe sex

**Objectives**

1. To help participants see the importance of talking with their friends about safer sex.
2. To communicate the most effective ways for participants to talk with friends.
3. To give participants practice in talking with friends.

**Say:** “Up to this point, we’ve been talking about issues related to our own behavior. Now let’s focus a bit on how we can help our friends and our community. We’ve learned a lot about how to protect ourselves and how to protect others. However, we probably all have friends that we care about and we may not be sure that they are always being safe. We don’t want to lose them. Now that we’ve attended this meeting, we have an opportunity and the power to help our friends, so they don’t have to deal with the difficulties of being HIV positive. We can help save our friends’ lives.”

“It is extremely important that we do this because our friends will listen to us. And, unfortunately - as all the anti gay propaganda, gay bashing and battles over gay rights in our society show - not everyone cares about what happens to young gay and bisexual men, so it is up to us to protect our community.”

**Ask the group:** “What can we do to really encourage our friends to practice safer sex?”

**Ask the group:** “What are some good ways to approach our friends?”

1. Emphasize positive benefits of safer sex
2. Emphasize that being safe is “cool,” expected nowadays, and best for the entire young gay/bisexual men’s community
3. Use yourself as an example — don’t preach or be judgmental
4. Say “how to do it” — use yourself as and example
   - Group discussion/brainstorming of ways to encourage friends.
   - Facilitators may suggest specific things they could do or say to encourage friends.

**Group problem-solving**

**Ask the group:** “Can you think of any problems or difficulties that might arise in talking with your friends? What might those be? How can you deal with these?”
Encourage the group to really discuss the issues raised.

Scenarios and discussion

Scenario 1

[Say:] “It might be helpful for us to try acting out some ways we can talk with our friends. Would anyone like to volunteer?” (Role-play in large group).

[Say:] “You are at a dance with a gay friend. Your friend sees a guy who he thinks is very attractive. He tells you he's going home with him. You want to encourage your friend to have safe sex.”

Have the following group discussion after the role-play:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”

Scenario 2

[Say:] “Okay, let's try another type of situation. Who wants to volunteer?”

[Say:] “You and your friend are sitting at a cafe talking. Your friend is very sexually active. He's just finished telling you about the latest guy he picked up. You've never asked him what he does sexually with the men he sleeps with, but you're very concerned about him. What would you say?”

Have the following group discussion after the role-play:

[Say:] “How do you feel about how they handled the situation?”

“What seemed to work well?”

“How would you have responded?”

“What might you have done differently?”
Encouraging friends: giving out invitations and pins

Facilitator asks participants to each make a commitment to talk with friends about having safer sex.

[Say:] “One very helpful thing you can do for your friends is invite them to come to one of these groups. We have invitation packages (with lubricant and a couple of condoms) here that we'd like you to give to several of your friends.”

“Also, we have pins that you can wear to express your support for building a healthy local young men’s community. And this can be the start of building an entire community of young men here in our area—we all of us who have been here tonight—are in the position of saving lives, and helping our community grow! So, it’s incredibly important and urgent that each one of us commit ourselves to talking with and handing these invitation packets out to at least a few of our friends!”

“Also, we have pins that you can wear to express your support for building healthy local young men’s community. These may also trigger discussions with your friends and other people you meet about this Project and safe sex.”

(Give out pins.)

“If you feel good about what we’re trying to do here with this Project we’d appreciate it if you could wear this button occasionally and let other people know about us.”

Objectives

- To give participants materials to facilitate their talking with friends.
- To elicit commitments to talk with friends and support your community.

Emphasize the fun, social aspects of the Project.
Invitation to become involved

Invite participation in the Project

[Say:]  “We’re very excited about the Mpowerment Project and we’d love for each of you to continue being involved. We have lots of different ways in which you can be involved.”

Describe possible ways of getting involved:

- Help create outreach events
- Announce upcoming events and pass out calendar

Volunteer in other ways

- Outreach team (bar zaps, performance skits)
- Community Center (mailings, computer stuff, cleaning)
- Graphic design (materials development)
- Events committee
- M-group recruitment

Join the Core Group - the group that plans and runs the Project activities.

Interest sheets

[Say:]  “I have interest sheets here which list these various opportunities Please check those which you’d be interested in being involved in. We’d also like to have a way to get in touch with you, so please also provide your name, phone number, email address, and mailing address (discretion is assured).”

Thank you and evaluations

Thank participants for attending the group. Facilitators express personal feelings about their own experience tonight and what they got out of it.

Invite participants to share their reactions. Pass out the evaluation forms.
Informal socializing

Objectives

- To help the participants form friendships with each other.
- To encourage men to become further involved in the Project.

Turn on music!

Invite participants to stay and talk, have refreshments, look over materials, hang out and talk, etc.

Make sure no one is left out of socializing.

Give out materials, show guys around the house.

Remember that one of the biggest motivations to come to an M-group is to meet guys and have fun. So, turn on the music and have some fun after all that hard work!
Core Elements

1 Coordinator(s)
2 Core Group & other volunteers
3 Project Space
4 Formal Outreach
   (including Social Outreach
    Events & Outreach Teams)
5 M-groups
6 Informal Outreach
   (which is a focus on talking with &
    encouraging friends & acquaintances
    to be safe & get tested for HIV)
7 Publicity campaign
8 Community Advisory Board
   (optional)

Guiding Principles

Social focus
Empowerment philosophy
Peer Influence of safer sex messages
Multi-level approach
Gay-positive/sex-positive
Community-building
Diffusion of innovations
mPowerment

Together creating community for friendship for health for life

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Download a PDF of Module 14: M-group Meeting Guide, at