

FALL 2017

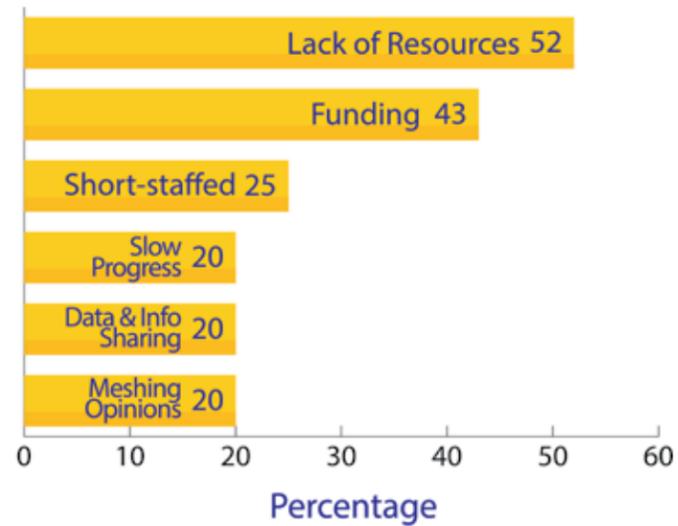
The Story of North Carolina Counties
County **QUARTERLY**
MAGAZINE

WHERE DOES THE WATER FLOW?

Floodplain Management Expert Shares Insights
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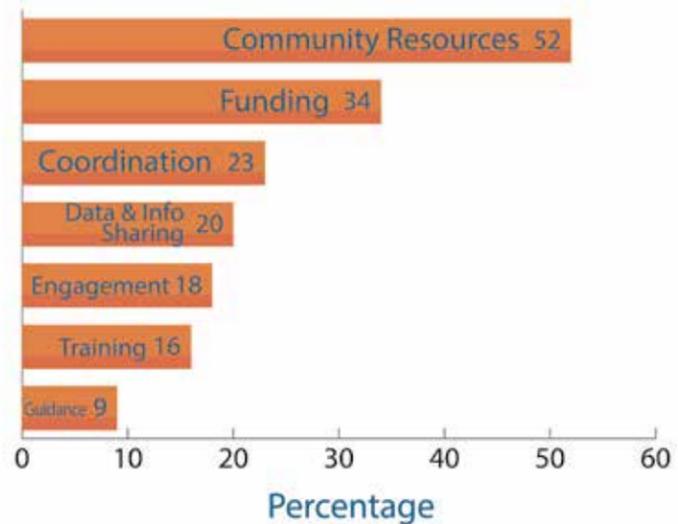


Figure 2



communities in implementing the Stepping Up Initiative. As can be seen in Figure 2, a lack of community resources –housing options, residential treatment facilities, psychiatrists, etc. – was by far the most popular response with 52 percent of the active counties identifying this to be a challenge in their communities. For most counties, diversion options are not available, and despite wide agreement that jails are not an appropriate place for individuals with mental illnesses, oftentimes there are no other options. Additionally, a lack of community resources available upon release makes it difficult for treatment plans to be followed, increasing the likelihood of recidivism. Other common challenges included a lack of funding, too few staff members, slow progress, difficulty sharing data and information across agencies, and challenges associated with meshing the opinions and perspectives among a diverse group of stakeholders.

Figure 3



Challenges Trends

Also as part of the study, counties were asked about the needs they have moving forward. Figure 3 shows that, unsurprisingly, community resources and funding were the two most common responses. In addition to these needs, counties emphasized the importance of designating an individual to coordinate the efforts in their communities. Those counties that have been able to designate a coordinator position have found that it has helped keep stakeholders engaged, facilitate discussion and collaboration, and ensure that action steps continue to be taken. Other common responses include the need to train individuals and groups at all points of contact within the criminal justice system, and for guidance on best practices.

Figure 4



Needs Trends

When asked to share any advice or lessons learned throughout this process, nearly 30 percent of the 44 counties emphasized the importance of having committed leadership, as can be seen in Figure 4. Having commitment from all major stakeholders (i.e., law enforcement, sheriff's office, and county commissioners) opens the door for opportunities that may not exist without their support. On a related note, a large percentage of

active counties also emphasize the importance of establishing a diverse committee that represents a wide cross-section of the community. The more voices a county can bring to the table, the more perspectives it can incorporate into its planning. This allows the county to create a more holistic plan of action. Counties also reported the benefits of using the Toolkit available on NACo's website, approaching the initiative with a lot of patience and understanding, and recognizing that your county's solution does not have to reinvent the wheel.

Advice and Lessons Learned

The county profiles included in the full report provide some insight and suggestions for moving forward and addressing the four greatest areas of need. Counties interested in addressing staffing needs may want consider as a first step designating an individual to lead stakeholder meetings and ensure meetings are regularly held. There is no need to feel as if this person has to bear the responsibility of implementing the entire Stepping Up program, or that they will forever fill this leadership position. Counties can start by making small changes in order to gain more financial support and commitment, and any funding that follows may be put toward a new staff position. It's also important to consider what kind of staff positions each stakeholder may need. In addition to a county facilitator position, perhaps the jail may need an individual to navigate the release process and connect individuals to community resources. With a complete understanding of the staff positions needed, the county can then work to prioritize these in order to make hires that will be the most effective use of funds.

To address the issue of Data, Information, and Training, Buncombe County stressed the importance of a planning committee considering data collection and program evaluation from the very beginning. Planning committees need to have an understanding of the data to which they will have access, and a plan to improve this data, and measure the success of any programs they choose to implement. Orange and Wake counties have had much success in this area by making use of research and data expertise at nearby universities.

The lack of community resources is certainly the most difficult need to address, but it is not impossible. Some counties have joined forces with their neighbors to create a regional approach to the Stepping Up Initiative. Franklin, Granville, Vance, Halifax, and Warren counties have established an interlocal agreement for approaching the problem and sharing resources between the five counties. Davie and Forsyth counties have also engaged in conversations surrounding community resources that could be utilized by both counties. Stakeholders from these counties have expressed that approaching the initiative as a collective has allowed the counties to do more to address this problem than they could do alone. Finally, several counties emphasized the importance of regularly holding meetings and providing updates to keep stakeholders engaged with the initiative. Mecklenburg County has found that viewing the initiative as a constantly evolving issue has helped maintain engagement. Keeping stakeholders aware of how things are changing over time, and regularly updating the committee's goals and mission to fit these changes will not only improve engagement, but will also help the county build the most successful program that it can. ■

The NCACC worked closely with the North Carolina Practice Improvement Collaborative to develop a day-long statewide Stepping Up Summit held in May that attracted over 200 attendees. Keynote addresses were provided by Dr. Fred Osher, Director of Health Systems and Services Policy at the Council of State Government Justice Center and Leon Evans, President and Chief Executive Officer for the Center for Health Care Services in Bexar County, Texas. Buncombe, Pitt and Alamance counties spoke about their on-going Stepping Up program experiences as a part of the Summit. The Summit presentations and materials are available on the Association's website.



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