

RWJF ID#: 70626

Team Name: Southwest Washington

Major Activities: This team of four local health jurisdictions (as they are known in Washington State) and one tribal health department, in the southwest corner of Washington, wanted to capitalize on their long and successful history of multiple collaborations and create a formal structure to facilitate the development of efficient and effective CJS arrangements in the future.

From the outset of the grant, the team discussed project activities during an existing monthly meeting. They began by discussing potential governance structures for a formal partnership, but never achieved consensus on models to further examine. The team then switched their focus to develop an inventory of service delivered in each jurisdiction, identifying those that could benefit by sharing resources. This inventory served as the basis for considering new CJS arrangements.

The team developed a weighted decision-making criteria schema to prioritize dimensions for consideration in CJS efforts. They also tested a software program for decision-making as another method of selecting programs to share across the region. When applied to existing or past CJS arrangements, neither of these tools produced results that reflected the successful nature of these efforts, and therefore were deemed to be of no benefit to the group.

The team experienced turnover both with one local health officer and the commissioners in three of the counties. In addition, new state mandates dominated the work of the team during their monthly meetings, leaving little time and even less good will for discussions about voluntary CJS arrangements. Mid-way through the grant period, the team realized that these factors presented insurmountable barriers to pursuing voluntary CJS arrangements, and they ended their grant before the funding period came to a close.

Accomplishments: Although this team did not have anything to show with respect to furthering their own CJS efforts, a great deal was learned about factors that can impede successful CJS exploration and planning. These learnings have been affirmed by other SSLC grantees as well and are reflected in technical assistance and resources developed by the Center. In this manner, this team's experience has contributed immeasurably to assisting others in their CJS efforts. What was learned is discussed in the next section on challenges.

Challenges: Several factors, both internal and external, conspired against the team and ultimately quashed their ability to move forward with voluntary CJS arrangements.

From the outset, the team did not have a shared philosophy about the benefits of a CJS approach to a region. Some felt that CJS arrangements were beneficial if they enhanced an

individual jurisdiction's capacity. Others believed that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," in other words, that each jurisdiction stands to benefit if the region as a whole is enhanced. The underlying assumptions for pursuing CJS arrangements was never intentionally explored. Rather, the different assumptions eventually surfaced during the course of the team's work. It became evident that these philosophical differences were, in part, responsible for the strife the team encountered in its work.

The team's monthly meetings evolved into highly contentious affairs as they addressed new state mandates aimed at furthering the intent of the Affordable Care Act. The team needed to negotiate how to move forward in implementing the mandates, sometimes with the ability to make decisions among themselves and sometimes acting solely at the behest of their governing bodies. The team encountered significant disagreements as they engaged in this work, which was compounded by a lack of agreed-upon conflict resolution processes. The meetings always began with discussing the state-level issues. When the time came to discuss the CJS work, it was impossible for the team members to switch gears and approach the new agenda item with a fresh and untainted perspective.

Moreover, elections that took place in late 2012 brought considerably different political approaches in 2013 for the four counties. Out of a total of twelve County Commission positions, eight were up for election in 2012, and six commissioners were new in January 2013. Newly elected county commissioners brought about new and different alliances, and new and different approaches to issues, including whether (or not) to share services across jurisdictional boundaries.

At the same time, the county with the largest population experienced significant turnover in County management positions, including changes of Director, Health Officer, and public health agency structure, during 2013. After his departure, the team recognized the contributions that the director, who had led their collaborative efforts, had made to the team. In addition to being visionary and politically savvy, he was a skilled negotiator and served to galvanize team members and their collaborative efforts. With his departure the team no longer had a member who could fill his shoes in that manner.

Moreover, the administrative structure was modified when the director departed, such that the positions of director and health officer were consolidated into one position. Up until that point, the county's health officer had also served as a regional health officer through an agreement with the other three counties. The health officer assumed the new, combined position, effectively eliminating the position of regional health officer. The remaining three counties initially embarked on a joint recruitment campaign for his replacement, but ultimately only two of the counties ended up sharing a new health officer and the third county went solo in this regard. The decision to forego sharing a single position transpired in such a manner that the camaraderie that had previously existed was further fractured.

This team's experience (and that of other CJS project sites) highlighted the importance of several factors that can profoundly affect the formation of successful CJS arrangements, namely trust, clarity of objectives, a sense of regional identity, and positive interpersonal relationships.