

LITS Bulletin

Louisiana Integrated Treatment Services (LITS) Technical Assistance Bulletin (TAB) Issued by the LA Behavioral Healthcare Taskforce TAB No. 5

It is the goal of LITS, according to Guiding Principle #9, to incorporate input from community stakeholders throughout the process of infrastructure development. Below are some tips and descriptions that will help you understand this important element of the project, and guide you on how you can best support your local area in ensuring the voices of community stakeholders are heard and responded to.

Community Networking Group (CNG)

What is a Community Networking Group (CNG)?

Community Networking Groups are locally formed stakeholder entities that include clients, consumers, family members, advocates, sister agencies, private providers, and any other concerned person who has a stake in the service delivery system for people with co-occurring mental and addictive disorders. A CNG can be a separate entity, in and of itself, or it can be part of one or several pre-existing community-based organizations that already include members described above – we may refer to this type of arrangement as a “CNG Affiliate.” (For examples of similar collaborations, visit namhpac.org and click on “resources”.)

What does a CNG do?

CNGs are designed to provide a unique perspective to the local treatment system to help shape the way treatment is designed and delivered. As the name suggests, “networking” is another function of CNGs, as they are part of the statewide advocacy network for co-occurring disorders treatment. (For information on consumer advocacy, visit mhawestchester.org/advocates/somhadvocacy.asp, bipolarworld.net, bazelon.org/links/nat_advocates.htm, & nami.org.) Members have an opportunity to become acquainted with each other and the local service delivery system, and to dialogue on ways to work together to positively influence infrastructure changes, all in collaboration with local Steering Committees who are tasked with LITS implementation.

CNGs may explore a variety of areas pertaining co-occurring disorders treatment infrastructure, in close partnership with local Steering Committees. Topics addressed may include (but are not limited to): *Agency Philosophy, Management Structure, Access, Screening & Assessment, Treatment Planning, Treatment Programming, Professional Relationships, Program Policies, Psychiatric Services, Discharge Planning, Staff Competencies, and Family Involvement.* By dialoguing on these issues, CNGs identify and advocate for community strengths and needs on a local-&-state level, thus contributing to the local LITS adaptations. (For online dialogues on co-occurring disorders, visit treatment.org/Topics/DualDialogues.html.)

How do we ensure CNG input is incorporated in the agency infrastructure changes?

In developing CNGs, as with any community group, it is important to identify leaders and

partners who reliably facilitate CNG activities, and act as a liaison between the CNG and the local Steering Committee. (For leadership tips, see nasmhpd.org/publications.cfm and click on “The Change Agent’s TOOLBOX SERIES”.) As we all know, communication is a two-way process, so it is important to ensure a consistent flow of information between the CNG and the local Steering Committee. A CNG must determine who will handle communication responsibilities, and what the protocol will be for delivery, review, and response to the information, whether collected via meeting dialogue or survey (eg., LITS Consumer Survey developed by the LITS Client Advisory Board).

TIPS for CNG leaders to develop and maintain CNGs – (Elements of these TIPS are taken from communitycollaboration.net, nmha.org/position/ps3.cfm, and scottlondon.com/reports/ppcc.html - sites dedicated to the “nuts & bolts” of building community collaboration and consensus.)

- 1) **MEMBERSHIP:** Promote the opportunity to participate by supplying agencies and organizations with the CNG Welcome Brochure (updated with local contact #s). Hype it up and make “Co-occurring disorders treatment” the hottest topic of discussion and advocacy.
- 2) **MEETING ADVERTISEMENT:** Circulate meeting notices at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting. Advertise in local newspapers with free public service announcements. Depending on your area’s circumstances, more media coverage may be recommended to highlight positive community movements.
- 3) **LOCATION:** Select a meeting location that is neutral and accessible to CNG members. Depending on CNG preferences, consider alternating locations regularly.
- 4) **ACCOMODATIONS & ATMOSPHERE:** Create a meeting atmosphere that is positive and upbeat. Provide refreshments when possible, and encourage members to bring their own information for networking. Award handy door prizes, such as free literature or materials.
- 5) **AGENDA:** Start off meetings with a general focus that is flexible for the CNG to steer the discussion. Once the CNG has identified a relevant issue, adapt the agenda accordingly. *Remember to coordinate the CNG agenda with Steering Committee priorities, so both entities are working on the same page – this takes a coordinated effort.*
- 6) **MEETING CONDUCTION:** Start on time and end *early*. This honors and rewards the members’ dedicated efforts. Anticipate a need for materials – either provide hard copies, or send out electronic copies prior to the meeting. *Remember, go with the flow!*
- 7) **RESPONSIBILITY & EXPENSE:** Since CNGs must be self-sustaining, it’s wise to delegate tasks in order to share the load and disperse expenses. This entails seeking assistance from agencies represented in local Steering Committees – check with managers for office supplies and equipment usage. Tap into money-saving resources - for example, reserve free meeting space at partnering agencies, libraries, schools, churches, hospitals, etc; arrange for refreshment donations; make double-sided copies – *be economically creative!* Remember to always thank your sponsors, and offer tokens of appreciation (eg., certificates of appreciation, extra refreshments, public acknowledgement, etc.)

We understand that each community is unique. LITS embraces those differences and encourages each group to pave its own path. Good luck in building lasting collaborative networks in your community!