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## Decision-making: Selecting an Intervention to Implement

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### Three basic decision-making styles

#### Individual makes a decision

#### Group votes

**Plurality:** When there are more than 2 choices, the greatest number of votes carries the decision. The resulting decision may not have a majority of people who voted for that decision.

**Simple majority:** More than half the votes are cast for a certain course of action.

**Two-thirds:** Two-thirds or more are in favor of a certain course of action.

#### Group reaches consensus

**Hard consensus:** Everyone overtly agrees.

**Soft consensus:** Everyone may not agree, but the dissenters don't object to a certain course of action.

### The role of the group leader in decision-making

The role of the group leader is to help the group decide what decision making style to use each time there is a decision to be made. Additional responsibilities include:

- Insure people are comfortable during the decision making process.
- Look at the big picture and remind your group of the goal.
- Obtain information from a wide variety of sources.
- Consider all possible solutions.
- Evaluate the possibilities.
- Decide, using your chosen style of decision making.
- Follow through on the decision.
- Decide when not to decide.

**A decision matrix is a chart that includes:**

**Choices.** The options to be considered are listed in the left hand column

**Criteria.** Criteria by which to discuss and assess each choice are written across the top.

**Rating.** Each option is rated on a scale (in the example and in the exercise, the scale is 1 to 3, with 3 being the highest rating)

**Weight.** Because some criteria are more important than others, each criterion may be weighted; each initial rating is multiplied by the weight.

**Total score.** The ratings of all the criteria for each option are added to determine its total score.

**A decision matrix is helpful because it allows the decision making group to:**

- Clearly see options
- Identify and clarify decision-making criteria
- Discuss each option according to each criterion
- Weight the criteria in terms of how important each one is to the decision maker
- Modify the criteria as needed

The final decision is made taking into consideration the scores and underlying values of the decision maker. The matrix is used to identify objective criteria, clarify underlying values, and simplify the process of making difficult decisions.

### Exercise: Collaborative Decision-Making: Selecting an Intervention

The purpose of this activity is to practice group decision-making using a decision matrix to prioritize and select intervention to implement.

Work in small groups of 4 people. Select three individuals to take on the following roles:

1. **Leader/facilitator.** This person will facilitate the discussion and keep the group on task.
2. **Recorder/reporter.** This person will take notes and report the results of the discussion.
3. **Observer:** This person will participate in the group discussion and notice group dynamics and what is working well.

#### **Scenario**

The Your Community Suicide Prevention Coalition decided to address \_\_\_\_\_ as their highest priority at-risk for suicide population. The task now is to prioritize and select one intervention to address this group.

Members of the coalition spent six months gathering additional information to determine the risk and protective factors unique to the selected at-risk population. They spoke with leaders in other communities around the state to determine what other communities were doing to address this problem. In addition, a literature search was conducted, members of the State Suicide Advisory Committee were consulted, and the recommendations of *The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* were studied. As a result of this additional research, a list of possible interventions was developed.

Although each intervention was advocated by three or more members of the coalition, they all agreed to use their chosen style of decision making to select the one to recommend to the Board of Health.

**Part 1: Instructions**

Work individually and rate each intervention listed in the decision matrix based on your current knowledge and experience. For the first four criteria (i.e., effectiveness, feasibility, sustainability, and acceptability), rate the intervention using the following scoring system:

- 1 = not at all**
- 2 = somewhat**
- 3 = very**

For “possible unintended consequences”, use negative numbers:

- 1 = not at all (unintended consequences are very unlikely)**
- 2 = somewhat (unintended consequences may occur)**
- 3 = very (unintended consequences are very likely)**

Add your scores across to achieve a total score for each intervention.

Possible Intervention	Effectiveness	Feasibility	Sustainability	Acceptability	Possible Unintended Consequences	Total Score
1. Advocate for reduction of lethal means						
2. Establish a suicide prevention and crisis hotline						
3. Train school/medical personnel to be gatekeepers						
4. Create a peer counseling program						
5. Educate physicians about the latest research in treating depression						
6. Work with media to implement national guidelines						

See the next page for definitions of each of the criterion above.

## Criteria for selecting an intervention.<sup>1</sup>

### *Effectiveness*

What is the likelihood that the activity will accomplish what it is set to accomplish? Does the literature suggest this activity is effective in reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors?

See [www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org) for current listing of evidence-based practices for suicide prevention programs.

### *Cost feasibility*

Does it make economic sense to include this activity to address the problem?

### *Sustainability*

Is the activity sustainable in the event that resources disappear or are reduced? If implemented, will the effects of the activity continue with fewer resources than originally required?

### *Political Acceptability*

Is your activity ethical? Is it equitable? Is it constitutional? Does it violate human rights? Is it unreasonably intrusive? What is the prevailing political mood about this activity (e.g., is there existing legislation regarding the health problem)?

### *Social Will*

Do community leaders and members of the at risk population support this activity? Are people aware of the problem; resistant to changing things that contribute to the health problem; concerned about the cost; or too busy to care about the health problem?

### *Possible Unintended Consequences*

“First, do no harm.” It is important to be open to the unintended results of your initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> Criteria are adapted from Fowler & Dannenberg, 1999. *The Intervention Decision Matrix*. Baltimore, MD: the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy.

## Part 2: Instructions

1. Discuss with your group the relative importance of each criterion. In other words, decide if one or more of the criteria are more important than the others.
2. Assign a number from 1 to 5 to each criterion. A score of 5 indicates that a criterion is the most important criterion for your group. Write that score on the row titled "weight".
3. Copy your scores from Part 1 of this exercise into the grey boxes in the table below.
4. Enter the weighted scores, multiplying the weight by original scores.
5. Add your scores across to achieve a total score for each intervention.

Possible Intervention	Effectiveness	Feasibility	Sustainability	Acceptability	Possible Unintended Consequences	Total Score
<b>Weight</b>						
1. Advocate for reduction of lethal means						
<b>Weighted score</b>						
2. Establish a suicide prevention and crisis hotline						
<b>Weighted score</b>						
3. Train school/medical personnel to be gatekeepers						
<b>Weighted score</b>						
4. Create a peer counseling program						
<b>Weighted score</b>						
5. Educate physicians about the latest research in treating depression						
<b>Weighted score</b>						
6. Work with media to implement national guidelines						
<b>Weighted score</b>						

### Part 3: Double check your decision

Take an additional 10 minutes to answer the following questions about your highest ranking intervention(s):

- Will the intervention reduce risk factors and/or enhance protective factors?
- Is the intervention evidence-based or based on sound prevention principles?
- Will the intervention further the goals of *The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention*?

Then consider possible barriers to implementing your chosen intervention. Discuss the following questions:

- What would make it difficult to implement this intervention? What are the potential barriers?
- What shifts in the environment, like funding or priorities, should we keep our eye on?
- What technical or materials-related problems could stop or delay us?
- Are members of this team willing to make a commitment to this course of action?

Identify strategies to overcome each barrier or reconsider other possible interventions.

Recorder/Reporter: Prepare to report your group's decision and explain the rationale for the decision that was made.

### Summary

A decision matrix helps to identify the explicit criteria to be considered in choosing activities; and the relative importance of each one.

Communities are encouraged to determine their own criteria and relative weights of each criterion.

Choosing activities is a collaborative process and using a decision matrix helps community leaders to facilitate the process in a systematic way.

A necessary part of the decision-making process is the assessment of your community's and each partnering organizations' capacity, resources, and commitment to implement the desired intervention.

When assessing capacity, resources, and commitment you may choose:

- To implement interventions for which you already have capacity, resources, and commitment
- To build capacity, seek resources, and obtain commitment by educating and motivating community

## **Reflection**

What did you learn by doing this exercise?

What thoughts or feelings did you notice while participating in this exercise?

**Leaders:** What did you experience as you facilitated the exercise?

**Recorder/Reporters:** What did you experience as you calculated the scores and reported the results?

**Observers:** What did you notice about the group during the activity? What worked well? What didn't work so well?