

Progress on Prevention in NVPC – PL Region 3: Insights from Regional Partners

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Acknowledgments

Focus groups and individual interviews with the Northeast Vermont Prevention Consortium (NVPC) – Prevention Lead (PL) Region 3 coalitions, subgrantees, and Vermont Department of Health (VDH) Prevention Consultants were conducted by the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) as part of an evaluation of the efforts of the NVPC – PL Region 3. Funding for this work was provided by NVPC through a grant from the Division of Substance Use Programs (DSU) at VDH. The time and willingness of coalition and subgrantee staff, and Prevention Consultants to participate in interviews and focus groups is gratefully acknowledged.

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Background and Methods

As part of Northeast Vermont Prevention Consortium's (NVPC) ongoing efforts to support funded coalitions and subgrantees in NVPC – PL Region 3, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) was contracted to facilitate focus groups and individual interviews to better understand the impact that the support and funding provided by the NVPC has had on regional prevention capacity and efforts.

Focus groups were organized by participant roles. One focus group was comprised of NVPC – PL Region 3 Prevention Consultants (PCs), and the remaining three focus groups included subgrantees. Because of their unique role within the region, we conducted individual interviews with each of the four community coalitions. The interview and focus group guides were developed in collaboration with NVPC. The NVPC Coordination Team reached out to coalitions and subgrantees to inform them of the focus groups and interviews and their purpose, and to encourage participation. PIRE then followed up via email to establish the most convenient times for participation.

The focus group with PCs was conducted in December 2025, and the three focus groups with subgrantees and four individual interviews with community coalition staff were conducted in January 2026. Due to scheduling conflicts, one additional individual interview was conducted in January with a subgrantee. Focus groups and individual interviews were conducted by Julia Pencek and Amy Livingston virtually via Microsoft teams and lasted 45-60 minutes. Participants were informed that their responses would be summarized and would not be linked to anyone individually in the summary report. A total of 18 individuals participated in a focus group or individual interview. All Prevention Consultants, coalitions, and community subgrantees in Region 3 were represented.




Participants consented to being recorded for the purpose of notetaking using AI. Interview and focus group transcripts were cleaned, and any identifying information was removed. Transcripts were summarized by role, interview guide question and then imputed into Microsoft Co-pilot. Co-pilot was used to summarize key themes by role, analyze themes across roles, and identify supporting quotes. These primary themes were then reviewed and validated by PIRE staff, and utilized to outline the report. Additional findings and subthemes emerged through staff analysis of the results.


About this Report:


The findings in this report are organized by the four guiding evaluation questions that were used to help develop and inform the questions in each focus group and interview guide. The questions in each interview guide varied slightly based on the participant's role. The findings below will present these differences based on role, as well as present themes across roles.


Evaluation Questions:

- 1 What progress has been made at the regional and community levels on the NVPC goal "Build substance use primary and secondary prevention capacity and infrastructure at the community and regional levels"?


- 2 What are the successes and barriers or challenges of this regional prevention structure?


- 3 How well has the current structure worked with Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital (NVRH) having the responsibility for fiscal management and having the NVPC coordination team overseeing funding and supporting prevention activities in the region?


- 4 Based on the information gathered in addressing the first three questions, what adjustments (if any) in the administration and structure of the NVPC should be considered as this project continues?





1. Progress Toward Building Regional and Community Prevention Capacity

All participants were asked about their perceptions of how collaboration and regional capacity has changed as a result of the work of the NVPC. Several themes emerged in response to these questions and will be described below by role and across groups.

Growing Recognition of Prevention Across the Region

Prevention Consultants were asked about the ways that NVPC has influenced how substance use prevention is understood across the region. They described the positive impact that NVPC has had through prevention-related training opportunities offered by NVPC and the emphasis on collaboration and connection between community organizations.

Coalitions and subgrantees were asked how partnering with NVPC has influenced collaboration with other groups working on substance misuse prevention in their communities. Coalitions described that partnering with NVPC has influenced the way that coalitions across the region collaborate with their communities and each other. They also described improvements in cross-coalition collaboration by regularly meeting, sharing ideas, tools, resources, and training. These supportive interactions are recognized as valuable by coalitions across the region.

Subgrantees shared that this funding has strengthened collaboration and supported common understanding of protective factors in communities. Several shared that by collaborating with each other they see prevention through various lenses, which has strengthened how they see their program's role in prevention.

Sustainability

Coalitions were asked about the ways that NVPC funding has supported the long-term sustainability of their coalition. Coalitions emphasized the value of stable, predictable funding, which supports long term sustainability, allows them to retain staff, and enables them to expand prevention programming. Coalitions shared appreciation for NVPC's flexibility and understanding in terms of how funding is used, and shared appreciation for the ability to be creative and enhance their primary prevention focus.

Subgrantees shared appreciation for the ability to apply for multiple rounds of grant funding, contributing to sustainability and longevity of activities. Subgrantees also mentioned their appreciation for NVPCs willingness to fund projects in similar areas, noting that this leads to a sense of collaboration and support, rather than competition between community organizations.

Strengthened Community Partnerships and Youth Engagement

Both coalitions and subgrantees discussed new and deepened community partnerships with schools, libraries, recovery centers, and other community organizations. They highlighted Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) meetings, community forums, and cross sector collaboration as key mechanisms for building capacity. Coalitions described how these partnerships have helped boost prevention across the lifespan. Subgrantees emphasized that these collaborations have helped to create open lines of communication between schools and subgrantees, as well as parents and youth. Participants described how partnerships with recovery centers in particular have allowed for a whole family healing approach, and have been helpful for reaching both youth, adults, and caregivers.



The great thing is, is that it gives our students hope too, that there is a place for their parents. And we have had high school kids bring their parents to us and that's huge.

I think it helps us give wrap around support for the whole family and it feels like it's more healing to the community and not just focus on the adults, but focus on the whole entire family.

Participants described powerful examples of relationship building with students, families, community partners, and their respective communities at-large. One respondent shared that in a middle school class, seven students have experienced someone in their life overdosing, underscoring the urgency and importance of their work in supporting these youth. Participants emphasized the importance of connection and collaboration, highlighting that prevention happens together and takes buy-in from various sectors of the community.

Participants often shared gratitude when describing how this funding has allowed for increased youth engagement, for example several Participants mentioned CADCA and other in-person forums for youth voice to come to life. Participants highlighted how NVPC funding has helped them deepen relationships, expand programming, and create spaces where youth feel like they belong, student leadership is encouraged, and families feel connected and supported.



It's strengthening that net of belonging and who they can turn to and share with and connect with. I feel like it's so helpful for our staff to recognize the whole human being first and the academics will come. And I think that it's been lovely.

Some opportunities through this grant work ...have sort of prompted us to listen deeper to kids...by setting or creating an intentional space to really do that has happened several times through this grant work, and that's really powerful.

Persistent Capacity Gaps

Despite the progress being made to expand prevention capacity across the region, participants across groups identified similar barriers and capacity challenges. Coalitions and subgrantees shared that staffing limitations and volunteer burnout can be a barrier especially in small or rural coalitions or organizations. Some noted that “adult organizing leader fatigue” can emerge after several years of programming, and high turnover at community organizations can make progress with community partners challenging, feeling like they are constantly starting over and rebuilding.

Though school engagement was described as relatively smooth and easy for some participants, many participants discussed difficulty engaging schools, describing this as a long-standing challenge. Readiness, staffing, student schedules, and competing priorities within schools were noted as barriers to implementation and collaboration. After-school activities/programming are not always feasible and can be a barrier for students who have limited access to transportation.

Participants across roles shared similar challenges with geographic barriers, particularly in remote areas where partners struggle to maintain consistent presence and accessible transportation is limited or non-existent. Additionally, long-standing unhealthy community norms (e.g. viewing drinking as a rite of passage, parents providing alcohol to teens at parties) present a barrier to readiness and intervention acceptance. Several participants also discussed that at times prevention programming is a secondary priority when having to be reactive to meeting the basic needs of individuals/communities. Lastly, Prevention Consultants noted the need for additional emphasis on expanding regional prevention for adults, older adults, and college age residents.



All the things that the community is going through show up in a public space, including the really hard things, including people who are overdosing or needing a place to use and/or needing a place to live. And so we were encountering more of those kinds of activities that we realized we didn't have the expertise within our organization to feel super confident about how to support and we also knew that it wasn't just a [location] issue or an organizational issue, but that it's a human issue and it's a community wide, and any approach to supporting those needs in the community should be held by the whole community or explored and understood by as much of the community as possible.

Together, these findings show that NVPC has strengthened prevention capacity in region 3, marked by stronger shared understanding of prevention, deeper community partnerships, and growing confidence among those doing the work. Participants described a noticeable rise in

regional awareness of prevention concepts, with protective-factor and risk-reduction frameworks increasingly guiding programming. Several participants noted that NVPC funding not only enabled their work but also validated their approach, helping them see their activities through a prevention lens and reinforcing their role in the regional system. Trust in NVPC's leadership, support, training, and coordination emerged as a notable strength, contributing to partners' confidence and willingness to engage. While structural challenges still limit reach in some areas, the region is moving toward a more cohesive, sustainable, prevention-oriented system with strong relational foundations and momentum for continued growth.



2. Successes and Challenges of the Regional Prevention Structure

Strong Relationships, Communication, and Trust

When asked how well the NVPC has built and maintained strong relationships with community partners across the region, Prevention Consultants emphasized NVPCs offering of trainings, responsiveness, innovative support, and communication through RAC meetings and newsletters. PCs emphasized the NVPCs willingness to respond and connect.



Something really positive with NVPC is it's never a no, like a straight out no. It's always a well, all right, let's talk about it. Let's try and figure it out. Let's see what we can do. And if not, then here's this person. You should really talk to them to see if they can help. It's a very positive engagement when someone does reach out to NVPC.

Prevention Consultants described their role as connectors — “eyes and ears to the ground” — who bridge VDH and NVPC systems and help ensure that prevention messages, trainings, and resources reach local partners. Being the bridge between NVPC and VDH allows Prevention Consultants to have insider knowledge that was described as helpful, though they also mentioned that this role sometimes involves thoughtfully managing nuanced dynamics between the NVPC and VDH/DSU.

Coalitions viewed the regional prevention structure as successful and noted few challenges with the regional prevention structure itself, rather challenges emerged related to staffing and long-standing community norms.



I would really love some more support that is relevant to the Northeast Kingdom...breaking through the unhealthy cultural norms that are alive and well here is a challenge.

Subgrantees shared that this grant program and structure is validating in how they approach their work, with relationships and partnerships at the core of the regional structure. Subgrantees shared feeling supported and that the NVPC is committed to helping them grow and support creating safe spaces and belonging for youth and families across the region. The regional prevention structure has led to various positive impacts and outcomes for subgrantees. Subgrantees did not find there to be specific challenges with the regional structure, rather specific challenges emerged related to community needs, capacity, and related barriers.

Participants described the regional prevention structure as highly relational, supportive, and grounded in trust. Participants shared that being connected to training/professional development opportunities is one of the many benefits of being connected to NVPC, and noted feeling supported by NVPC through problem solving, resource sharing, and collaboration. "The lines of communication have felt really clear, open, and accessible." Participants described NVPC staff as "kind," "thorough," and "easy to work with" and noted that whenever they need any form of assistance NVPC staff "always make themselves available."

Regional Model seen as Community Grounded and Accessible

Participants emphasized the value of having a regional prevention lead. Participants appreciated that NVPC staff understand local context: "People managing these grants are either community members or have experience living in the community." Some participants described the regional model as more accessible and responsive than statewide structures.

Overall, the regional prevention structure is functioning well, with strong relationships and effective grant management. Challenges primarily relate to capacity, community needs, and administrative burden rather than structural flaws in the model itself.



3. Functionality of the Current NVPC Administrative and Fiscal Model

Participants across roles were asked to share their perceptions about the NVPC grant application, fiscal processes, and reporting systems. Overall, participants described the current administrative and fiscal model — with NVRH managing fiscal responsibilities and NVPC overseeing funding and prevention support — as generally effective, clear, and well-functioning with few areas for improvement.

Clear Funding and Reporting Systems

Coalitions described their experiences receiving NVPC funding as straightforward and relatively simple and have appreciated the flexibility with this grant. Overall, they described feeling very supported by the NVPC.

Subgrantees were asked to describe their experience applying for NVPC funding. Overall, subgrantees found the process smooth and felt that the NVPC team was supportive and responsive to questions. Some subgrantees did share that the application required a high level of detail and felt rigorous for a relatively small amount of funding. For those who have staff to assist with grant applications this was not problematic, but for small organizations with limited staff capacity or those who are managing multiple grant applications this can be a challenge. One participant noted the administrative burden of having a quarterly report and grant application due at the same time.



I feel like the grant was very detail oriented, but with the amount of grants that we do, I will say this is one that definitely requires a lot of information and gathering and details, which isn't necessarily bad, it's just for preparation wise, it's a lot of information.

Our central office person said this is a pretty small amount of money and in her context and it felt like a lot of work.

Smooth Fiscal Processes and Clear Expectations

Subgrantees felt that this grant was user-friendly, and that reporting and invoicing guidelines are clear. They have also appreciated reporting reminders and report feedback. Newer coalitions described a learning curve in tracking spending, submitting invoices, and reporting, however they noted that this has become easier over time with the assistance of the NVPC.

Participants consistently described NVPC's funding and reporting processes as accessible, well organized, and supportive. The application was described as rigorous but clear, and the reporting process as manageable and well supported. One respondent noted, "This is one of the more user-friendly grants... the reminders are really nice."



It was a great experience, I felt very supported. All my questions were answered quickly and thoroughly.

Participants described invoicing and accounting as straightforward. One respondent noted, "The invoice spreadsheet with the formulas already auto populated is pretty convenient." Other Participants similarly described invoicing as very clear and appreciated the quick turnaround for payments.

Effective Grant Management and Flexibility

Participants appreciated mid-cycle feedback on reports, describing it as validating and helpful. Describing NVPC staff as responsive and collaborative, participants noted that the coordination team provides strong oversight and works well together to solve problems.

Prevention Consultants were asked what has gone well in how NVPC manages grants for community partners and coalitions. PCs described the NVPC grant management process as very responsive and engaging. They emphasized productive technical assistance, teamwork, and problem-solving whenever there is not a quick solution to a challenge. PCs also discussed the extensive, thorough, and comprehensive information available to grantees.

Challenges: Fiduciary Requirements and Timing

Across participants few challenges arose when discussing the grant application and management. Some participants described challenges securing fiduciaries that meet hospital level requirements, which delayed project start dates. One respondent noted that specific reporting deadlines (e.g., the 12th of the month) can feel unusual or easy to miss. Additionally, some first-time grantees described early confusion with reporting expectations. Typically, this is resolved after exposure to the reporting process and assistance from NVPC.



The thought of reapplying is absolutely on our radar to do it, but it's just a lot of work, especially when we're in the middle of actively using that grant funding.

Despite these challenges, all groups emphasized that the overall structure works well and supports effective prevention work.

4. Emerging Trends and Recommendations for Future NVPC Structure and Administration



Emerging Trends

Participants were asked to describe the local conditions or emerging trends related to substance use that they are noticing in their communities that the Northeast Vermont Prevention Consortium should be aware of or consider responding to. Responses included:

- Housing insecurity
- Poverty
- The impact of technology and social media on mental health and the intersection with substance use
- Lack of adolescent treatment centers
- Youth vaping
- Increased use of Kratom, cannabis, Xylazine, methamphetamine and cocaine

Recommendations

Participants did not have many recommended changes to the NVPC structure or administration. However, from our analysis several recommendations are identified below for strengthening NVPC's structure as the project continues.

Reduce administrative burden

- Consider how to reduce the level of detail or information required for grant applications
- Better alignment of deadlines - Set funding application due date so that it does not coincide with quarterly report due dates.

Continue to strengthen prevention capacity across the region and lifespan

- Consider targeted funding opportunities to support prevention with college students, adults, and older adults.

Continue and expand on NVPC's strengths

- Responsiveness, support, and technical assistance
- Anticipatory training
- Solution-oriented culture
- Strong community relationships
- Continue to emphasize protective factors that align across sectors with funding approach and communications