

advocacy
focus group
report



Alliance to Prevent Sexual
& Domestic Violence

Minnesota Men's Action Network: Advocacy Focus Group Report:

1. The Minnesota Men's Action Network and the Need for Advocacy Focus Groups:

The Minnesota Men's Action Network (MN-MAN) was initiated in 2005 by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to build a public/private prevention effort that promotes male leadership in the prevention of sexual and domestic violence. To this end, a collaborative effort between the MDH, Men As Peacemakers in Duluth, Minnesota and the Gender Violence Institute in Clearwater, Minnesota was created to develop a network of men and male leaders across the state. Current efforts are being supported by MDH, the Bush Foundation and the MN Department of Public Safety.

MN-MAN supports the historically groundbreaking activities of women to prevent sexual and domestic violence. The organization's goal is to connect a diverse network of 500 men who: 1) Promote fair and safe relationships; 2) Create and support healthy, joyful sexuality; 3) Develop organizational practices and public policies that respect the dignity of every human being, not as sexualized objects or social subordinates to use, exploit, or disregard, but as persons with inalienable rights to choose the opportunities and circumstances of their lives. The achievement of these objectives is directly connected to respecting, listening to, and honoring the perspectives of women and advocates working to ending domestic and sexual violence.

The MN-MAN project is distinctive in its commitment to ongoing partnership with advocacy organizations. As part of this commitment MN-MAN sought and secured the support of Minnesota's major sexual assault and domestic violence coalitions including the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA), the Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition (MIWSAC), and the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women (MCBW). Working with the coalitions MN-MAN developed and organized a series of advocacy focus groups to listen to advocates, volunteers and staff who work in sexual assault and domestic violence programs around the state. It was essential for MN-MAN to seek the knowledge and perspective of advocates before organizing men around the state. Advocacy focus groups were fundamental to linking women's voices and experience to the process of organizing men. They were also an important building block to strengthening the ongoing partnership between MN-MAN and local and state advocacy organizations.

2. Description of Advocacy Focus Groups:

Each three hour advocacy focus group included information on the MN-MAN project, explanation and strategizing around primary prevention, and discussion about men's involvement in the movements to end sexual and domestic violence. Focus groups sought information on the opportunities, challenges, and threats advocates associated with men's involvement — as well as what 10 organized men could do in each of their communities to prevent sexual and and domestic violence. Please see appendix A for the focus group agenda.

MN-MAN facilitated seven regional advocacy focus groups with a total of 75 participants; 70 were women and 5 were men. The focus groups averaged 12 participants (one had only 3 participants.) Local advocacy organizations were asked to sponsor the focus groups, and each advocacy organization in the region was invited to attend. The vast majority of participants were advocates, but participants also included men and women with connections to advocacy organizations. The advocacy focus groups were located in: St. Paul, Rochester, Marshal, Fergus Falls, Bemidji, St. Cloud, and the Fond du Lac Indian Reservation.

3. What We Learned:

Several key points emerged in the advocacy focus group discussions. (For a complete list, please see Appendix B.) Overall we were pleased that a substantial representation of programming was evident in most regions and conversations were engaging and thoughtful.

Advocacy focus group participants voiced a good deal of enthusiasm for the potential of men's involvement in preventing sexual and domestic violence. At each location, one or more programs expressed an interest in having local men organized and involved. There was great interest in the possibility of organized groups of male allies changing the normalized social perception that sexual and domestic violence is only a women's issue. It was common to hear the statement, "Men created this problem...Now they have the opportunity to fix it!" Participants were also hopeful of the potential for organized men to provide much needed human and monetary resources toward primary prevention, and to serve as role models in their community as they actively change social norms supporting sexual and domestic assault.

Common concerns that emerged included challenges and threats connected to the socialization of, and normalized interactions between men and women. Concerns were expressed about keeping a gender-based analysis of domestic and sexual violence, and observations that men often become defensive when challenged by women. Unease was also

expressed about competition over funding. There were many questions about which men would be welcomed into this movement, what motivates men's involvement and facilitates their ongoing commitment, and if men's involvement has any staying power and thus can be relied upon.

Overall, advocacy focus group participants reflected tremendous excitement at the possibility of men working to end sexual and domestic violence. There was great enthusiasm for the way organized groups of male allies would change the normalized social perception that sexual and domestic violence is only a women's issue. Participants were also pleased with the potential for organized men to provide much needed human and monetary resources toward primary prevention, and to serve as positive role models in their community as they actively change norms surrounding men's involvement in sexual and domestic violence.

Common concerns that emerged included challenges and threats connected to the socialization of, and normalized interactions between men and women. Advocates spoke about feeling pressure to play to the sensibilities to men: The success of the domestic violence and sexual assault movements is due to the fact that women have provided the leadership. If women in these movements are pressured to consistently respond to men's concerns (some of which are ill informed), it could begin to undermine 30 years of philosophy and work. It was clearly articulated that if this project fizzles, advocacy organizations will have to pick up the work that is left behind.

In every focus group advocates indicated that they had never had an organized group of ten male allies in their communities. In fact, if men were organized around sexual and domestic violence, it was generally to oppose the work advocacy organizations were doing. Despite the fact that men's involvement had usually been problematic, advocates came up with ways men could become involved in their community. Ideas, in general, were based in community education, mentoring boys, creating connections with other community organizations, and taking personal responsibility to challenge sexism and violence against women and children.

Finally, comments make clear that while the organizations are excited about the prospect of having men involved, they also feel it is critical that men accept responsibility for organizing an effective partnership. Many advocacy programs are already operating at capacity (and beyond) and consequently have limited resources to expand their work to include organizing men. Adding the work of involving men and prevention can feel overwhelming at the same time it is exiting. One participant said: "Women are too busy focusing on saving victims to focus on primary prevention." Participants also believed that some of the work they do in intervention is a form of prevention and does not get credited as such.

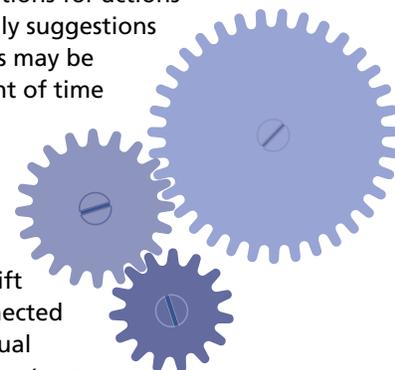
4. Evaluation

As part of the process for the Advocacy focus groups an evaluation was given to each participant at the end of the group. (Appendix C) Responses were almost all positive on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent. The written responses were also positive with several showing up numerous times. One of these, in response to the question — What did you find most helpful about the focus group today? — "Men's perspective" and "hearing about what is currently going on in the state" In response to the question — What would you improve about the focus group? — a number of respondents suggested that it have been good to have even more people attend. In response to both this question and Other Comments? — a number of people suggested another meeting.

5. Conclusion

All information shared at the advocacy focus groups is beneficial to the future of the MN-MAN project. Some of the comments we heard represented new concepts for some of us and many reinforced our previous ideas of how best to proceed. It is particularly difficult to appropriately fit men into intervention-based sexual assault and domestic violence work, so it is significant that advocates felt men could be a significant asset in primary prevention efforts. The genuine support and excitement advocates showed for the MN-MAN project was inspiring. Particularly given that advocates' past experiences with men's involvement with the movements to end sexual and domestic violence has presented on-going and persistent challenges and/or threats to themselves and their programs. A great need and desire for men to become involved is certainly present, and MN-MAN will carry advocates' experience, concerns and wisdom into the process of organizing men.

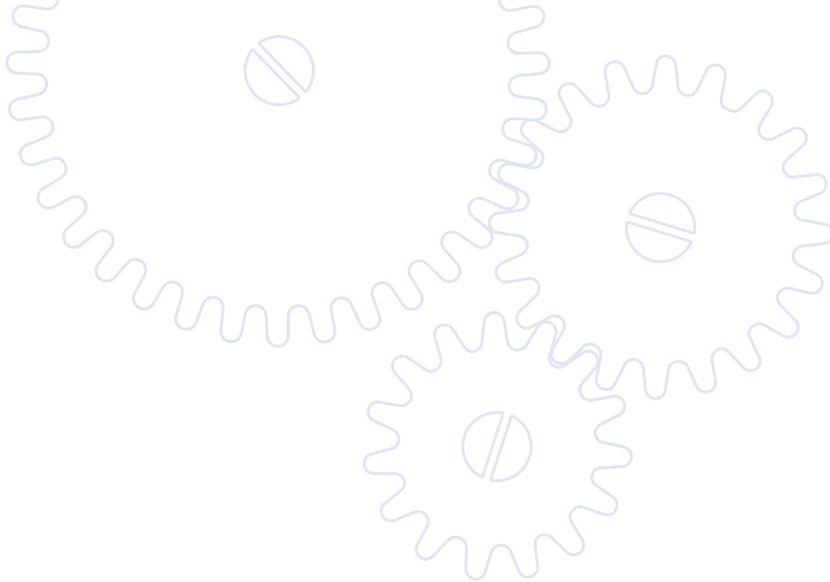
Another interesting theme that emerged was the relatively small amount of concrete suggestions for actions men can take as allies — especially suggestions based in primary prevention. This may be due, partially, to a limited amount of time available to brainstorm suggestions, or to the fact that organized men's involvement is a new concept. The lack of ideas also speaks to the fact that primary prevention requires a shift in thinking for most people connected to the domestic violence and sexual assault movements. Though advocates are interested in men's involvement as allies in ending domestic and sexual violence, thought surrounding primary prevention strategy across the spectrum of prevention is quite new, especially as we incorporate the entire spectrum of activity from individual education through public policy development. Strategizing with advocacy organizations and



men alike will be instrumental to identifying concrete ways to engage men, and ultimately to the success our future work.

As expected, the advocacy focus groups have helped shape the next phase of the project — men's forums in communities throughout Minnesota. Men's forums prioritize information on male socialization, primary prevention, and how to be an effective ally in the movement to end sexual and domestic violence. MN-MAN's organizing efforts are groundbreaking, and each step in the process is instructive. To be successful, it is clear that men working as allies with women will need to continue to be transparent, accountable, open to challenge, and flexible as lessons present themselves throughout this journey. It is also apparent that part of MN-MAN's work will be to help men learn, as socialized individuals, how to be effective allies. It will be important to listen to advocates and respond appropriately in situations where men are acting in

counterproductive ways. The advocacy focus groups have been a great learning experience and the goals and activities of the MN-MAN project will continue to be informed by and accountable to women's voices, their lived experiences and inspiring leadership.



Appendix A Agenda

1:00 Welcome By Local Programs

Intro Selves And Overview Of Focus Group.

- Opening statement — Intro selves and overview focus group
- Focusing on violence by heterosexually identified men.
- Frank and I learned from women — men needing to listen to women, take leadership from women and take own initiatives as well. Allies with women. Concerns about organizing men. Doing this carefully so men don't take over and also how do we address concerns about the men involved etc.
- Coalition Facilitator Intro
- MN-MAN — Brief history and explanation of project

1:10 Participants Introduce Themselves

(Slide — Thank you for coming)

- What brings you here?
(Flip chart)

1:25 Working With Men — Coalition facilitator

- When you think of working with men, what comes up for you?
(Flip chart)

1:35 MN MAN Presentation (Frank and Chuck)

- Quick overview of problem
 - Stats
 - Stats talk about women's lives but also talk about men's lives. Widespread cultural support.
- Social Norms
 - Social norms supporting sexual violence. Defining norms
- Primary Prevention and intervention defining the difference(look at LALI slides)
 - Spectrum of Prevention
 - Give examples of what has been done
 - Ask participants to give other example
- Social Norms that support sexual and domestic violence — Focus on male and female socialization
 - Five norms
 - Magazine collage
 - Listening/silencing women(victims) — sexual assault a private matter
- Prevention Works — Spectrum

2:05 WHAT IS MN MAN?

- Overview of our activities

2:15 Break

2:30 DISCUSSION

(Facilitated by Coalition Facilitator and us)

Any thoughts on what we have said so far.

For us to make MN MAN a successful program we need to understand and build with the work that women have been doing in this field. Specifically we need to know what you think about the involvement of men in your programs and in the effort to prevent sexual and domestic violence. There are positives and negatives to men's involvement. We would like to hear your thoughts and have several questions related to that.

- Challenges — Given what has already been said what do you think the challenges are for working with men?
 - Note — List example of challenges here on flip chart
 - (Facilitators should have their own on-going list)
- Opportunities — What do you think are the opportunities?
 - Note — List examples of opportunities on flip chart
 - (Facilitators should have their own on-going list)
- Threats — What are the threats?
 - Note — List examples of threats on flip chart
 - (Facilitators should have their own on-going list)

3:20 ENGAGING MEN

(Any facilitators)

- If you had a group of ten men in your community who were willing to do something about primary prevention, what would you want them to do?
 - Put on flip chart
 - Compare to spectrum — see how they are clustered
 - More brainstorming across the spectrum
- Engaging Men — Target audience, who to engage, how to engage them, what they can do.
- If you had 6 men who were willing to volunteer for your program what would you like them to do? (Are you interested in that, and if so, what would you want them to do?)

3:50 Final thoughts and closing — where we go from here.

Appendix B Focus Group Responses

What follows are the responses transcribed from Advocacy Focus Groups held in St. Paul, Rochester, Marshal, Fergus Falls, Bemidji, St. Cloud, and the Fond du Lac Indian Reservation. The question that was asked is stated and then the responses.

Opportunities

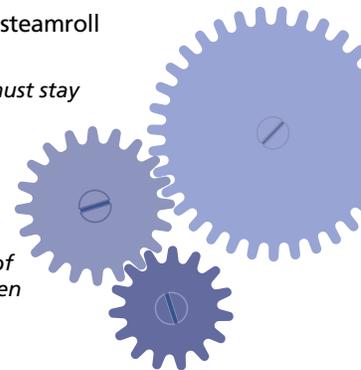
“When you think of involving men in the prevention of sexual and domestic violence what do you think are the opportunities?”

- Men created this problem...Now they have the opportunity to fix it!
Place focus where it belongs... on men's behavior
- Men can break into the “good old boy’s” club
support change in areas women's groups haven't been able to address
- Possible connections with male secondary victims
- Possibility of greater access to funding
- Greater ability to engage in primary prevention activities/policy change
increased resources — time, energy, focus
- Organized support for women’s organizations
- May have more buy in from the community
- Positive/Healthy role modeling — especially for kids
modeling power sharing
- Co facilitation
- Creation of a community of men working to end violence against women
addresses isolation and peer pressure
Normalization of conversation about sexism, equality, violence, etc.
- Men’s involvement will bring more credibility to the movement
will give women a louder voice
- Redefine what it means to be a man
- It is rejuvenating to have this kind of thought in the DV/SA movements
- Men have a chance to break their own barriers that hold them back [as humans].
- Men’s perspectives could create a better understanding of Safe Dating.
- Men could put time and energy into arguing that religion calls for equal/nonviolent/peaceful relationships.
- Being supportive of the women’s work should become the norm
- Men might learn to listen better, might gain perspective on their own privilege
- Might have a positive impact on victims to interact with respectful men

Challenges/Threats

“As in the last question, when you think of involving men in the prevention of sexual and domestic violence what do you think are the challenges and threats?”

- Key Political or Philosophical Concerns:
Feel both excited and conflicted about the success men can bring.
What motivations are pushing men?
- What are they getting out of this?
This is not an equal playing field — women risk more and do more to get things done.
- Men will have to give up their privilege
- Men should not take credit from women
- Will have to work very hard for very little recognition
Having to play to the sensibilities of men
- Diluting the issue
- Convincing men this is in their self interest
- Always have to tip toe around the issue to make clear we aren’t blaming all men
Must remain a gender-based issue
- Language needs to remain the same
- At the same time we’ll need to give men more of a say if they are involved
- How to find compromise without sacrificing our principles?
- Can’t ostracize men for not being on exactly the same page.
Key organizers must be on board politically
- Do not want to lose our political edge
It reinforces sexism when you send the message that it's ok to listen to men when you haven't listened to women.
Must help without hurting 30 years of work
- Men are problem solvers, and can steamroll things that were done in past.
Advocacy groups led by women must stay in lead
Do men ever truly “get it?”
What will the backlash be from men's lack of privilege?
Our narrow or limited perception of men could limit the potential of men in this work.



- Challenges and Threats related to this projects strategy:
Who/What/When/Where/Why/How — practically speaking who takes this all on
- It will be more work for advocacy organization staff
- Women are too busy focusing on saving victims to focus on primary prevention
- Slip into intervention when organizing through spectrum of prevention
*Each community will present distinct challenges.
What criteria do you have for men coming to the table?*
- Men will behave badly, and it will have to be dealt with
What gives this effort consistence and staying power?
- How long will men stay committed?
- Men frequently burn out quickly — then women have to deal with the aftermath
*The men we target won't be the ones that show up.
Competing for funding*
- Dependent now on Old Boy's Club for funding — don't want to jeopardize
- Have to spend time convincing people to fund and support this
It will be difficult for women to relinquish control and hand over work.
- Very difficult to trust
Men's involvement might impede some women's involvement or access to services.
- Men can make women feel uncomfortable
- Past Problems:
*Usually when men organize, it becomes bad for the movement — Father's rights etc.
Men have done a lot of blame shifting and victim blaming
Some men think they are experts because they are the same gender as the perpetrators.
Women's issues always take low priority — DARE got right into the schools.
Perpetrators have tried in the past to gain access to victims through volunteering
Men have exploited the movement as a way to "get into women's pants"*
- The previous two contributions can harm the sustainability of the project
- Socialization Issues:
Men often come in with a dominating attitude
- Some men involved because they want to rescue women
- Many men don't listen
- I never know if I am being categorized or tuned out by men.
- Women often are not believed
- Men are more solution-oriented and less process-oriented than women
Violence against women is not always seen as a real problem

Men and women assess success differently. Are we on the same page?

Bar is low for men

Many "good guys" think past their own behavior

Men struggle with publicly supporting movement, and there can be real consequences for them eg. Ostracism.

Men feel victimized quickly when they are challenged

- Many men aren't receptive to criticism — especially from a woman
- "Don't rape me"= Man Hater — women are always pushed back into the box
- Men are shielded from having to hear about the issue
- Can't even use the word feminism
Men take charge — people listen to men.
- In some focus groups male participants took over.
*Men believe it is an individual problem — not a community problem
Men are socialized to objectify women.*
- Women are socialized to fear (how do we move past this dynamic?)
- women are socialized to defer to men
How do we get men to empathize? Men lie — it is part of how they learn to get to the top — it is hard to trust men
- Girls are taught to be honest
- This statement (made by a woman) often makes men mad at women rather than mad at men for lying.
There is endless reinforcement of male privilege in our society.
- Men have a lot invested in things not changing
- Often unaware how they are impacting others
*Men are supposed to be mavericks —
Don't care what people think of them*
- Women are often shot down when they speak or move outside the box.

What would you do with an organized group of 10 male allies in your community?

At the beginning of each conversation, ideas were very similar from group to group and focused on the lower half of the spectrum — especially community education. On many occasions advocates suggested 10 men could really focus on primary prevention work. Many of the ideas placed on this spectrum are intervention strategies.

Individual Knowledge and Skills:

1. Normalize discussion about violence against women with other men
2. Challenge sexist/violence behavior/jokes

3. Take time to mentor boys and talk with them about respecting women
4. Serve as male advocates for perpetrators to help create accountability
5. Help facilitate support groups when/if appropriate
6. Practice listening

Community Education:

1. Work with youth
2. Create public service announcements
3. Say "Violence against women is wrong" in public
4. Share stories as a survivor or secondary victim

Educating Providers:

1. Educate ministers and congregations

Building Coalitions:

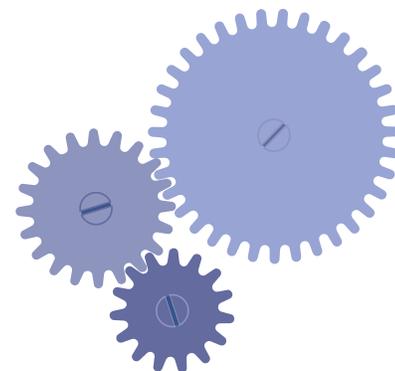
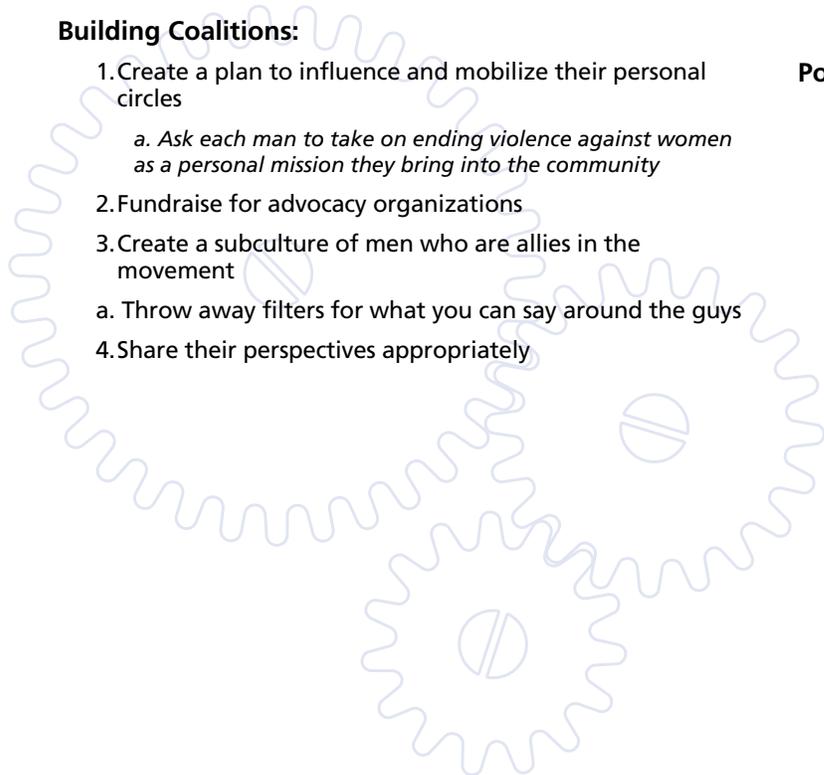
1. Create a plan to influence and mobilize their personal circles
 - a. *Ask each man to take on ending violence against women as a personal mission they bring into the community*
2. Fundraise for advocacy organizations
3. Create a subculture of men who are allies in the movement
 - a. Throw away filters for what you can say around the guys
4. Share their perspectives appropriately

Influencing Organizational Practice:

1. Work to standardize training in school for boys
2. Campaign to get media to focus on perpetration rather than victimization
3. Focus on own workplaces and work on policies (who's in upper management, SA, etc.)
4. Set an example in their community and hold other community members accountable
5. Normalize peer pressure against sexism etc.
6. Honor songs at pow wow etc.
7. Work to create venues or opportunities to model behavior and become part of the solution
8. Attack the mainstreaming of porn
9. Men can take on caretaking role in their homes to facilitate greater participation by women in the movement.

Policy Change:

1. Focus on own workplaces and work on policies (who's in upper management, SA, etc.)
2. Bring men to lobby, but have women lead the conversation
3. Encourage allies to run for office
4. Attack the mainstreaming of porn



Appendix C Evaluation

Please circle the answer that most closely reflects your opinion about how effective this focus group was in providing you an opportunity to:

	Poor					Excellent
Contribute to the discussion and thinking about how to effectively involve men in primary prevention.	1	2	3	4	5	
Explore the challenges and opportunities of men's involvement in primary prevention.	1	2	3	4	5	
Learn more about primary prevention and the social norms that support sexual and domestic violence.	1	2	3	4	5	
Think about how men in your community could be involved as effective allies to end sexual and domestic violence.	1	2	3	4	5	
Overall I would rate this focus group	1	2	3	4	5	
	Disagree					Strongly Agree
I support MNMAN's efforts to organize men as effective allies with women to end sexual and domestic violence.	1	2	3	4	5	

What did you find most helpful about the focus group today?

What additional information would you like to have about primary prevention and men's role in ending sexual and domestic violence?

What would you improve about the focus group?

Other Comments