

Coalition Guide Resource



SOPHE has developed an easy-to-use guide to assist communities and leaders through the process of building a coalition.

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#1 BEFORE YOU BUILD YOUR COALITION

What is a Coalition?

- A *community coalition* is a group of individuals representing many organizations who agree to work together to achieve a common goal.
- A coalition brings professional and grass-roots organizations from multiple sectors together, expands resources, focuses on issues of community concern, and achieves better results than any single group could achieve alone.
- A coalition involves an investment of time and resources, and it should not be built if a simpler entity will get the job done or if community support is lacking.
- A coalition may address a time limited issue or establish a more sustained collaboration that helps a community analyze its issues to identify and implement multiple strategies that lead to policy, social and environmental change.

Why Coalitions Form. Coalitions may form to:

- Respond to an opportunity, such as funding
- Respond to a threat or event such as a disease outbreak
- Expand organizations' limited time, expertise, resources, services, media coverage, contact with vulnerable populations or influence.

Characteristics of Effective Coalitions. Although each coalition is uniquely shaped by its community, successful coalitions have the following traits in common:

- Ownership and support of coalition by coalition members and community
- High level of trust and reciprocity among members
- Frequent and ongoing training for members
- Active involvement of members to develop action plan of goals and objectives
- Implementation of a community action plan
- Productive meetings and decision-making
- Effective structure: Committed leadership team guides coalition to design/implement strategies
- Guidelines and procedures
- Continuous evaluation of coalition and its activities

Coalition Benefits. Coalitions offer benefits such as opportunities to:

- Exchange knowledge, ideas, and strategies
- Share risks and responsibility
- Build community concern and consensus for issues
- Engage in collective action that builds power
- Improve trust and communication among community sectors
- Mobilize diverse talents, resources, and strategies. Coalitions enable organizations to build capacity and develop interventions that meet their needs, are community-owned, culturally sensitive, and likely to be sustained.

Coalition Costs. Costs associated with coalition membership include:

- Loss of autonomy, competitive edge or ability to individually control outcomes
- Conflict over goals and methods
- Loss of resources (time, money, information, status)
- Delays in solving problems or being recognized for accomplishments. Coalitions that survive over time must provide ongoing benefits that outweigh these costs

Stages of Development. Coalitions develop in iterative stages. Although different programs use a different number of stages or refer to them by different names, CDC uses the following:

- Commitment or engaging the community for build the coalition
- Assessment or looking at community assets and needs
- Planning or developing a community action plan of strategic coalition activities
- Implementation or conducting policy, and environmental change strategies
- Evaluation or determining how well the coalition has reached PES goals

Steps for Building an Effective Coalition:

1. Develop your leadership team
2. Recruit diverse community organizations and convene the coalition
3. A community strengths, assets and resources
4. Develop a community action plan with feasible and appropriate goals, objectives and strategies
5. Implement and sustain policy and environmental change strategies to reach goals
6. Evaluate and improve the coalition and its strategies

Feighery, E. & Rogers, T. 1990. *Building and Maintaining Effective Coalitions*. Palo Alto, CA: Health Promotion Resource Center, Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention.

Butterfoss, F.D. *Coalitions and Partnerships in Community Health*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

#2 COALITION FORMATION STAGE

What to Expect

In this stage, the coalition is young and must generate commitment. The first step in organizing the coalition is to identify potential member organizations from each priority sector: schools, worksites, healthcare, community-based institutions and the community at large. As each organization/agency is recruited, they begin to explore their motivations for joining the coalition, as well as potential costs and benefits of participating.

Each organization should help define/refine the community issue(s) to be addressed by the coalition and share what they will need to get from/contribute to the group. As they move forward, members must balance the needs for joint action and independence.

When recruiting organizations to the coalition, consider their:

- activities and accomplishments
- contributions (power, time, talent, resources)
- self-interests (personal and organizational gains)
- potential conflicts

Structure

The structure of your coalition will depend on the current political, economic and social realities, as well as existing efforts and groups that are already working on related community health issues. The coalition leadership team builds the commitment of others by identifying community assets/needs and seeking feasible strategies to solve community issues. The structure of the coalition will vary, but it should use funding and coalition member resources most efficiently and effectively.

Tasks

- Initiate collaboration, cultivate allies and begin to develop its purpose
- Identify potential member organizations' common, complementary and competing goals
- Identify core group of members based on community issue, needed expertise and resources
- Recruit & meet with members to discuss perceptions, hopes & concerns about coalition; solicit advice about how to address community issue
- Hold first coalition meeting and reach consensus on coalition mission
- Create ground rules for coalition functioning & etiquette
- Develop coalition goals and objectives
- Develop member criteria and participation agreements; verify members' ability to decide/take action on behalf of their organizations
- Decide who will speak for/represent coalition and criteria for acknowledging members publicly
- Develop communication and feedback mechanisms with member organizations

Products or Outcomes

- Recruitment plan
- Member roster
- Ground rules or meeting etiquette
- Membership agreements
- Mission statement (purpose)
- Coalition goals & objectives
- Logo & publicity materials (stationery, banner)

#3 IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

What to Expect

In this stage, coalition members find common ground and are committed to coalition and each other. They continue to share information, learn more about issue and begin to develop possible solutions. The coalition better defines its mission and the roles members play. Structure, leadership and decision-making are formalized and members begin to take action. New members representing different sectors may have to be recruited.

Structure

The coalition's structure becomes functional. A coordinator or director is hired; a steering committee is established; recruitment is more proactive; and additional funding is sought. A needs and asset assessment is conducted, a community action plan is created and strategy development starts. Early outcomes begin to be achieved.

Tasks

- Develop membership skills to enable them to work as team and implement work
- Conduct community assessment
- Educate members about issue; develop campaign to build community awareness of issue
- Identify promising strategies to address community needs/issue focus
- Develop community action plan: goals, objectives, strategies, roles, responsibilities, resources and timeline
- Develop work groups to implement strategies
- Determine how work will progress and be evaluated – what will success look like?
- Identify additional resources to support efforts

Products or Outcomes

- Meeting minutes and attendance records
- Management structure or organizational chart
- By-laws or operating procedures
- Steering (executive) committee and work group rosters
- Community assessment data
- Action plan
- Budget

#4 COALITION MAINTENANCE STAGE

What to Expect

In this stage, implementation of activities and projects begins. Members help determine the direction of the coalition and promote its mission when and wherever possible. They learn to deal with power distribution and resource allocation and are able to take on more challenges as trust and competence builds. Coalition becomes more visible in community. Goals and strategies are continuously refined. As initial goals are realized, members either recommit or leave coalition. Early leaders also may move on and coalition must address leadership development and succession.

Structure

The structure is developed and the coalition is a full partner with other organizations. Regular progress reports appear; engagement of membership is still a priority; planned activities expand; and communication network is fully operational. Intermediate outcomes are achieved.

Tasks

- Keep members and organizations engaged; review/renew member agreements
- Keep membership growing and informed; replenish or expand if needed
- Address organizational needs within coalition and revise structures/procedures as needed
- Rotate and develop leadership
- Continue to revise/implement action plans and keep projects moving ahead
- Evaluate changes and accomplishments
- Build on past successes to move to new goals and strategies

Products or Outcomes

- Meeting minutes & attendance records
- Updated rosters and mailing lists
- Revised by-laws or operating procedures
- Revised structures or organizational chart
- Regular communication channels (newsletters, action alerts, print/electronic media items)
- Revised community action plan
- New issues, goals and objectives
- Products from projects (reports, service directories, educational materials, campaigns, training)
- Primary outcomes achieved

#5 COALITION INSTITUTIONALIZATION STAGE

What to Expect

In this stage, the coalition has achieved its initial goals and built capacity in the community to make policy, systems and environmental changes.

Its strategy now is to:

- Become a permanent organization
- Be transformed with new leadership or different purpose
- Transfer its power to another organization

In essence, the coalition must decide on its future as a coalition – it may have experienced unresolved conflict and agree to disband; a subset of members may emerge and retreat to an earlier stage to regroup, or it may become a permanent coalition with loyal membership, influence, and solid financial footing. Ideally, its member organizations also have increased their capacity to build and maintain coalitions and partnerships for other purposes and learned valuable, transferrable community building skills.

Structure

The coalition reviews and refines structures; solidifies by-laws, policies and procedures; renews search for funding and explores separate corporation (501c3) status. The coalition also implements evaluation plan/disseminates results; assesses impact of strategies and achieves widespread reach into community.

Tasks

- Complete task, projects and campaigns
- Produce models, reports, new policies, practices and legislation
- Complete fund-raising or organizing drive
- Store records and materials
- Publish findings
- Institutionalize new services
- Select new projects, if desired

Products or Outcomes

- Goals achieved
- Reports, publications and products released
- New goals and objectives and projects are spun off
- Coalition
 - becomes a permanent organization
 - is transformed with new leadership or different purpose
 - transfers power to another organization
 - disbands