

Creating a Successful Coalition

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Introduction

So you have decided to join a coalition. You are probably very excited and dedicated. Now that you are ready to move forward, what do you do next? How do you start a coalition? What makes a coalition successful? Do you have a plan? Coalition can be defined as a group of people or groups who have joined together for a common purpose. How to start a coalition is not a mystery. First you identify your need, and then you find individuals or organizations that are interested in helping to find a solution for that need.

Getting Started with a Plan

Communicate, communicate, communicate! Communication is the key to a successful coalition and should be your first priority. When you convey your thoughts and ideas effectively, you successfully get your message across. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to share ideas and that the group works together on addressing communication barriers as they arise.

In addition to communication, to function effectively the coalition must:

- Select or nominate a facilitator.
- Assess needs and gather data on the issues being addressed.
- Write a coalition mission or vision statement.
- Develop a list of goals, including long-term and short-term objectives.
- Encourage cooperation and commitment from all members.
- Explore funding needs and options.
- Identify specific programs and activities that will keep the coalition working to achieve its goals.

- Celebrate accomplishments and find ways to reward member organizations.
- Tell others about the group's accomplishments.
- Evaluate what you are doing.

Remember, coalitions should create positive change. This positive change will be seen through the programs and activities that the coalition focuses on. Open communication and clearly defined objectives will keep the coalition addressing the identified issues not just today but in the future.

Maintaining a Coalition

A coalition's longevity will be determined by the flexibility and effectiveness of the group. Flexibility is the key to the success of most coalitions. Even the best set goals need to be flexible enough to change. Many successful coalitions are strengthened through setbacks and failures. To maintain a coalition:

- Provide training to members when appropriate.
- Keep members informed about all activities and actions being taken by the coalition.
- Develop a strategic plan so everyone is clear on priorities for programs, projects and activities.
- Make meetings productive. Have agendas with a purpose. Respect people's time and talents.
- Periodically evaluate what the coalition is doing. Members like to see the positive change their contribution is making.
- Circumstances arise when change is necessary; at these times you must be willing to adapt.



*Coming together
is a beginning,
keeping together
is progress; and
working together
is success.*

– Henry Ford



- Accept that organizations may leave the coalition. Make sure the group is structured well enough to absorb the loss of key member organizations.
- Determine when the coalition has served its purpose. Not all coalitions are intended to last forever.

Remember, coalitions are most effective when they are achieving their goals. Flexibility may be needed to reach a positive outcome.

Keys to Success

- **Recruit key members.** Usually groups of 9 to 11 organizations work best together. Recruit individuals from organizations that can help the coalition obtain its goals.
- **Establish a common goal or mission statement.** The coalition needs a shared vision to guide it through its work and decision making. The mission statement or goal should be concise, adaptable, believable and attainable, and it should represent what the coalition is about. If your organization chooses to join an existing coalition, be sure your organization's mission and purpose align with that of the coalition.
- **Value members.** Each organization must have the opportunity to participate and perceive themselves as important parts of the whole. Member organizations must have ownership in decision making. Members should know why they are on the coalition and what they can bring to the group. Members must be willing to adopt the group's goals and leave their own agenda at the door for the betterment of the group.
- **Commit to the solution.** Each organization must be committed to finding a solution to the problem.

- **Share leadership responsibilities.** It is important to share leadership responsibilities to make sure the coalition does not fail if a member organization moves on. It is also vitally important to the success of the coalition to appoint or assign a facilitator. The facilitator's role is to set up meetings, ensure accurate records of meetings and maintain open communication in the group.

Summary

No matter how well your plans are made, no matter how hard you work to maintain an effective coalition, you will face challenges. A successful coalition responds positively to challenges, is flexible enough to reassess its goals and understands the importance of communication. Coalitions should result in better service and high quality of work for all stakeholders and clientele. By joining together to work toward common goals, great things can happen.

References

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