

D R A F T - Elements Of A Successful Coalition

I. How Coalitions Get Started

The internal work of coalition building begins with taking a look at the community to determine if the community conditions are favorable for starting a coalition.

- ✓ Is the issue of interest to the community?
- ✓ Are there people to lead, and to share in the work?
- ✓ Are there changes in the resources available to the community?
- ✓ Is there an incentive--a dramatic event, a funding opportunity--to motivate people to come together?
- ✓ Is there a past history of working together successfully?
- ✓ Is there general good feeling about working together, regardless of history?

Is the community ready for a coalition? If not, we could do something smaller (incorporating Community Readiness Survey Results) to pave the way for a larger-scale coalition building effort.

II. Coalition Membership

To bring new members or to start a membership into the coalition, personal contact counts most. Face-to-face personal contact works best.

In making personal contact, it helps to learn the interests of your potential member, and to show how joining the coalition can fulfill those interests.

Potential members also need to see benefits from joining. What will they get in return? The benefits should exceed the costs. The moral:

Find the benefits for this particular prospective member, and point them out. This could be the job of the Coalition Director/Chair.

- ✓ A diverse and inclusive membership that represents the community
- ✓ Include residents from all economical levels
- ✓ Set convenient meeting times and places; provide transportation and child care: A member of the community may not want to participate in the meetings but can contribute their time by assisting others.
- ✓ Members can also participate without necessarily coming to formal coalition meetings. They can do coalition work at their workplaces and homes, in small groups, or by themselves. This can expand the boundaries of "membership."

Retaining Members

- ✓ To keep members active and engaged, they need to feel comfortable with other members of the coalition. A warm and welcoming atmosphere is a definite attraction.
- ✓ Every member should be given specific opportunities for accomplishment that meet personal and coalition goals, no matter how small. The more personal accomplishment, the more member involvement.
- ✓ Finding and keeping good members is labor-intensive and takes time. All members new or old, need care and feeding.
- ✓ Membership development time should therefore be budgeted. A coalition membership committee, or rotating task force, often makes sense. And each member can carry some share of the membership responsibility.

III. Coalition Meetings

People come to meetings, including coalition meetings, for two overarching reasons: They want to get something accomplished, and they want to have a good time. So a meeting should be enjoyable and productive for everyone there. Coalitions are delicate. In meetings, therefore, special attention must be paid to building relationships among different members of the group.

One bottom line, is whether people show up. If the meetings is valuable enough to them, they will be there. If it isn't, they won't. "A very simple measure of your meetings value is how many people are seated when the meeting starts." (Berkowitz, Wolff, 2000).

- ✓ Pay close attention to the physical environment where you meet. Is it attractive, light, airy? Is the temperature controlled?
- ✓ Does it simply feel good to be there?
- ✓ Build in some time to mix and mingle. You can do this before the meeting, during the meeting (by having a break), or after the meeting ends.
- ✓ Help make people feel at home. Greet them, smile at them, say hello. This is especially true for new members--think of them as your special guests.
- ✓ Food and drink are assets, no doubt about it. What makes them assets is that they keep people around and talking. Talking builds relationships.

- ✓ At the close of the meeting, thank people for coming; show your pleasure at seeing them; say how you are looking forward to the next time. End on an up note.

The Business Side

- ✓ Have an agenda, distributed in advance. Not too thick. Not too thin.
- ✓ Assign each agenda item a designated amount of time.
- ✓ Stick to the agenda items and the agenda times.
- ✓ Follow up on decisions made. For each decision, be aware of a) how it will be implemented, b) who will implement it, and c) how will you know?
- ✓ At the end, ask members for items they want to include on the next meetings agenda. And ask who would like to take the lead in presenting them.

Conflicts During the Meeting

- ✓ If someone speaks strongly in opposition, or with a contrary tone...Respectfully acknowledge the point of view or feelings expressed. Can they be incorporated into the meeting discussion or decision? If so, that's preferred. But if not, maybe the viewpoint or feeling can be positively developed in other ways--at the next meeting, or in another forum.
- ✓ If discussion goes well past the time allotted...Point out that the meeting is running overtime or this time, and ask the group whether it wants to keep discussing it now, or to move on to the next item of business.
- ✓ If you simply don't know how to proceed--if an issue is very complex, or if emotions run high...Draw upon and trust the

wisdom of the group. Spell out some of the options available. Solicit others. Ask group members how they would like to proceed. The chances are good they will guide you effectively.

- ✓ Each member's ideas need to be heard, acknowledged, and responded to as best as possible. Still, most of the time, don't hesitate to steer the meeting back to this main focus-- gently, but also persistently. Most members really do want to stay on course and leave the meeting knowing that they have gotten something done.

IV. Coalition Leadership

The meeting will go well when leaders:

- ✓ Prepare before the meeting
- ✓ Anticipate the different responses that might occur, and how to deal with each one.
- ✓ Stick to the agenda, but not too rigidly.
- ✓ Play to the audience; draw everyone in.
- ✓ Keep things moving. Watch out for slow spots, when interest may be waning.
- ✓ Check the pace, and if you need to, step it up.

Leadership Between Meetings

- ✓ Identify the tasks that need to be done between meetings.
- ✓ Put these tasks on a list.
- ✓ Prioritize the tasks. This can be very simple. For example, "What most needs to get done this week?"

- ✓ Delegate the tasks. First, ask yourself, "What do I need to do personally?" and "Who else can do what?" Then, ask others as needed. Be specific. Get commitments. Agree on timelines.
- ✓ Follow up on your delegation, by phone call or note. A good leader has mastered the art of gentle reminding. When the task is done, cross it off your lists, and move on to the next one.

The Qualities of the Leader

- ✓ There is value in guiding the coalition to make its own decisions at its own pace. A good leader spends the most time steering.
- ✓ There is also value in making direct suggestions and taking direct action, occasionally without full coalition support--for example, when a deadline approaches, or when you have special expertise, or when no one else is available. A good leader here picks up an oar and rows.
- ✓ Whether to steer or to row, or to drift for a moment, depends on your perception of the group at this point in time. Who is involved? What are their commitments, availabilities, and talents? What is the history? What is the mood of the group right now? A good leader will take in all this information and be thoughtful before responding.
- ✓ A good leader will be able to respond in many different ways. Not only that, the best response tomorrow may be different from the best response today. Good coalition leadership not only requires thoughtfulness, flexibility, and versatility, but also draws upon the full range and depth of one's character.
- ✓ A leader cannot be all things to all people all the time. So part of leadership is to stimulate and leverage the talents, interests,

and motivations of other coalition members in the service of the group. Good leaders know which switches will turn on the power, the best leaders make each member a power source.

Three coalition leaders responses to what are leadership qualities

"You need a sense of humor, a willingness to applaud the process as it goes along, to be welcoming, to be upbeat, to be a cheerleader whenever possible--and what's really important, to help people leave their suits at the door."

"I think you've got to really feel it in your bone marrow that you want to make a difference, that you believe a difference can be made, and that it's not a 9-5 kind of thing. It isn't a job. It really isn't a job."

"Leadership can be developed. But there has to be a desire on the part of the person to be a leader. The idea that anybody can do it is not necessarily true. I mean, there has to be the desire. But that person doesn't have to have all the right personality traits..."(Goodman, 1992).

Example of a Job Description for a Coalition Director

- Organize all Coalition activities
- Chair monthly meetings of the Coalition/interact with members on an ongoing basis
- Set agendas for Coalition meetings
- Work closely with Statewide/Regional Community Partners to coordinate with other coalitions across the state
- Develop press releases, reports and regular newsletters on behalf of the Coalition
- Develop and monitor Task Forces with membership around specific Coalition issues

- Recruit and maintain membership
- Provide contact with the media about health and human services issues
- Chair special events for the Coalition
- Play an advocate role around issues of human needs
- Coordinate programs and agencies
- Generate and provide resource materials on Coalition issues to members of the community at-large, legislators, etc.
- Be Coalition spokesperson to towns, media, civic groups, religious bodies, etc.
- Be responsible for overseeing any administrative/clerical staff hired to implement programs
- Work to encourage, through Coalition membership and programs, the empowerment of community residents in activities
- Establish the Coalition as a leader in prevention activities, coordination, publicity, funding, etc.

A good leader will check the health of the coalition in some structured manner. A self-assessment tool can help the leader and others learn more about how members perceive the coalition; adjustment can then follow.

Example of a Self Assessment Tool to measure member perceptions of coalition Clarity.

To check the clarity in your coalition, give your opinion regarding each area by placing a number selected from the scale in the parentheses under the name of the area.

1 Very Unclear 2 Unclear 3 Clear 4 Very Clear

I. Statement of Purpose - Is the mission statement for the coalition focused enough?

()

II. Criteria for membership--how official **voting** membership status is determined?

()

III. Representation - The number and level of representatives expected from member organizations?

()

IV. Authority - The degree to which coalition decisions are expected to be binding on member organizations?

()

V. Leadership--The officer roles and responsibilities?

()

VI. Selection procedures--The means of choosing officers, committee chairs, etc.?

()

VII. Meetings - Scheduling and expectations for participation?

()

VIII. Meetings management- ground rules for conducting business (e.g. rules of order) written agenda, etc.

()

IX. Decision making-procedures for making official decisions (e.g., quorum, consensus, voting procedures)

()

X. Work responsibilities - documentation of who will do what, by when?

()

XI. Fiscal management--procedures for receiving and disbursement of funds?

()

XII. Accountability and evaluation--reporting responsibilities and criteria for evaluating success?

()

V. Maintaining the Coalition

- ✓ A coalition is a social system. It is subject to the same principles as all other social systems.
- ✓ Change is an inevitable part of system life.
- ✓ A coalition will change and evolve over time. It won't always stay exactly the same.
- ✓ However, a coalition can control change. It can determine its own direction, at least partially.
- ✓ That prospect itself can energize and guide the coalitions work.

Types of coalition Change

- ✓ Growing (in many different possible ways)
- ✓ Staying the same (or attempting to)
- ✓ Combining (including sharing, merging)

Making the Choice Among Change Options

Assess the following variables

- ✓ The people who belong to your coalition--their backgrounds, preferences, styles and desires
- ✓ The time that your coalition members have available - or are willing to make available
- ✓ The resources available to your coalition, both current and projected.
- ✓ The community needs at the present time-what are they? How strong are they? Are they long-time needs or are they relatively new? Who else might be available to meet them?
- ✓ The external environment--community attitudes toward your coalition, local politics, larger social forces, and special circumstances unique to your own situation.

Examples of evaluation tools to learn what coalition members think about growth, change or stay the same.

Self Assessment

I. Overall Impact:

A. Do you feel that the coalition has made contributions to the_____

- 1. Little/no contribution 2. Some contribution
- 3. Major contribution

B. Do you feel that the Coalition has been helpful to you personally?

- 1. Not at all helpful 2. Somewhat helpful 3. Extremely helpful

2. Accomplishment of Coalition Goals:

A. Has the Coalition been helpful in providing information to you, your agency, and to your clients: Any Examples?

- 1. Not at all helpful 2. Somewhat helpful 3. Extremely helpful

B. Has the Coalition been effective in mounting advocacy efforts for_____

- 1. Not at all helpful 2. somewhat helpful 3. extremely helpful

3. Suggestions:

A. How might the Coalition act in the future to best meet your own needs?_____

B. What changes would you suggest of the topics the Coalition addresses?_____

_____ Yes, I will continue to serve on the Coalition for the _____ year

_____ No, I am unable to continue to serve on the Coalition _____

Please consider _____

(name, organization, phone) as a potential member)

Coalition Priorities 2009-2010

- 1) Youth Alcohol Prevention
- 2) Prescription Drug Abuse
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

Please complete the following to assist in the preparation of the Coalition Report and the new Coalition brochure:

1). For the past _____ year(s) the Coalition has: _____

2). Significant Coalition Successes include: _____

3). The most rewarding or meaningful thing for me about being a member of the Coalition is: _____
