

### Pre-Formation: Before You Get Started

**Coalitions Defined.** A *community coalition* is a group of individuals representing diverse organizations or sectors who agree to work together to achieve a common goal.<sup>1</sup> The terms *coalition* and *partnership* are used interchangeably, although a partnership has to involve only two partners. 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. Nonetheless, a coalition is not a panacea. Because it involves an investment of time and resources, a coalition 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. A coalition works with a community by analyzing its issues and identifying and implementing multiple strategies that lead to social and environmental change.

**Is a Coalition Right for You?** Before forming, potential partners should scan the environment, assess whether coalition is advisable or needed, and take stock of their capacity. If you respond “no” to any items below, carefully consider whether a coalition is the best organizational structure for your issue.

		Yes	No
1.	Does issue affect a broad range of people?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Is issue complex, i.e., needs information/expertise from diverse community sectors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Is broad public awareness or education needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Do gaps in services or programs exist, i.e., no organization now does this work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Do other organizations see this issue as a priority?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Are these organizations willing to collaborate to address this issue?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Are organizational goals/policies of potential members similar or complementary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Are there resources that can be shared or obtained to assist with the work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Why Coalitions Form.** Coalitions are established for many different reasons; they often form: 1) in response to an opportunity, such as funding. 2) because of a threat or event such as a disease outbreak. 3) to expand organizations’ limited time, expertise, resources, services, media coverage, contact with vulnerable populations or influence; or 4) because they are mandated by a funder, as in ACHIEVE.

**Characteristics of Effective Coalitions.** Although each coalition is uniquely shaped by its community, successful coalitions have the following traits in common:<sup>2</sup>

- Competent, continuous staffing
- Ownership and support of coalition-by-coalition members and community
- High level of trust and reciprocity among members
- Frequent and ongoing training for members and staff
- Active involvement of members to develop coalition goals and objectives
- Development and implementation of strategic action plan
- Productive coalition meetings and decision-making
- Effective structure: Steering Committee guides Work Groups that design/implement strategies
- Formalized rules and procedures
- Continuous evaluation of coalition and its activities



**Coalition Benefits.** Coalitions offer benefits such as opportunities to: 1) exchange knowledge, ideas, and strategies; 2) share risks and responsibility; 3) build community concern and consensus for issues; 4) engage in collective action that builds power; 5) improve trust and communication among community sectors; and 6) mobilize diverse talents, resources, and strategies. Coalitions enable organizations to build community 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: 1) loss of autonomy, competitive edge, or ability to control outcomes; 2) conflict over goals and methods; 3) loss of resources (time, money, information, status); and 4) 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: 1) *formation* or building of the organization, 2) *implementation* or strategic planning and conduct of activities, 3) *maintenance of* activities until goals are met, and 4) *institutionalization* or collaborative attainment of goals.

### **Steps for Building an Effective Coalition**

1. Conduct initial community assessment
2. Determine whether to form a coalition
3. Create awareness of key issue(s)
4. Recruit the right organizations and convene the coalition
5. Develop preliminary strategic plan: mission, goals and objectives
6. Develop staffing, resources and funding for coalition
7. Create coalition structure and elect leadership
8. Create coalition procedures and action plan
9. Implement and sustain activities to reach goals
10. Evaluate to improve activities and coalition

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1. Feighery, E. & Rogers, T. (1990). *Building and Maintaining Effective Coalitions*. Palo Alto, CA: Health Promotion Resource Center, Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention.
  2. Butterfoss, F.D. *Coalitions and Partnerships in Community Health*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.