Coalition Leadership

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The people who lead, participate in, and implement the activities of the coalition affect the growth and development of the group. Coalitions with strong leadership are better able to create policy, systems, and environmental change in their communities (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000). This type of leadership requires a variety of skills, many of which are listed in this fact sheet. A coalition may benefit from a leadership team made up of people with different experiences and skills, given the diverse nature of skills required for success.

Common Leadership Roles

- **Coalition Coordinator or Facilitator**: conducts meetings, plans, and implements activities, provides general oversight to the coalition
- **Committee Chairs**: conduct workgroup meetings, serve as liaisons between committee and coalition
- **Secretary**: notifies coalition members of upcoming meetings, takes meeting minutes
- **Treasurer**: prepares budget, managing resources, maintains financial records

Shared leadership is recommended for coalitions, as it exposes the coalition to new ideas, reduces dependency on a single person, helps prevent burnout, and provides more members with leadership opportunities. A coalition should foster an environment where future leaders can develop, and it may want to consider creating terms of office to encourage diverse leadership.

Leadership Skills

Different skills may be more or less important at different stages of coalition development. During the formation process, for example, facilitation and listening skills are often useful for the recruitment and engagement of diverse members. In a more mature coalition, negotiation and advocacy skills may be needed to bring about more complex environmental change (Roussos and Fawcett, 2000).

Members of the leadership team should possess good communication, negotiation, and networking skills. They should also be able to do the following:

- Set priorities
- Delegate tasks to coalition members
- Encourage shared leadership
- Encourage information sharing
- Understand how their community operates
- Frame the mission and vision of the coalition to stakeholders in order to engage other leaders throughout different community sectors
- Practice cultural competence

» Roussos and Fawcett define cultural competence as the respect for, engagement with, and mutual influence among people of different ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds.

The Role of the Facilitator

The facilitator brings diverse ideas together and rallies members around a common concern or goal. There are specific skills and qualities that can help a facilitator effectively manage a coalition. Some of these skills (problem solving, conflict management, and decision making) are covered in later fact sheets in this series. Other skills may come with experience. An effective facilitator should strive to do the following:

- Do more listening than talking
- Discern when to facilitate and when to participate
- Steer the group away from competitiveness
- Provide positive feedback and reinforcement of good work
- Engage all members in the work of the group
- Keep all meetings focused on the goals of the coalition
- Establish brainstorming sessions where members can freely share ideas
- Involve all members in coalition meetings, including the quiet ones
- Develop an awareness of what is not being said and how to have it stated
• Tie together various questions and concerns raised in group discussion
• Lead thorough discussions of controversial issues that result in a group consensus
• Make sure that all members are aware of decisions that are made by the group
• Create an environment of trust where members can share their ideas comfortably and confidently
• Structure opportunities for members to participate in coalition activities, such as conducting a community assessment or recruiting new members
  » These opportunities provide members with a chance to acquire and develop new skills, which keep them engaged in the work of the coalition (Kegler and Swan, 2012).

Qualities of an Effective Facilitator

• Honesty
• Transparency
• Positivity
• Belief in the coalition
• Flexibility in coordinating meetings and activities
• Neutrality
• Attention to/support for member concerns

Although these qualities are especially helpful when possessed by the facilitator, other coalition members and leaders may possess qualities that could be beneficial to the group. It is important to recognize and utilize these leadership skills, as equal voice and participatory leadership are encouraged within coalitions to move the group forward and to help reduce conflict. Additional proactive strategies to manage and reduce conflict are covered in the 15th fact sheet in this series titled Common Difficulties Faced by Coalitions.

References


Additional Resources

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute. "Downloadable Resources." Publications on community assessment and community mobilization. abcdinstitute.org/publications/downloadable

Coalitions Work. "Tools and Resources." Resources for a variety of coalition processes and coalition evaluation. coalitionswork.com/resources/tools

University of Kansas. "Community Tool Box." Toolkits on a variety of topics related to partnership building and community change. ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents


Iowa State University, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development. Vision to Action: Take Charge Too. Publication about community assessment, vision development, action planning and evaluation. soc.iastate.edu/extension/ncrcrd/ncrcrd-rrd182-print.pdf