Community Coaching to Enhance Coalition Capacity and Effectiveness

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Community coaching is a change strategy that can help a coalition increase community capacity, overcome challenges to community development and increase the effectiveness of its collective efforts. Community coaches encourage coalition members to reflect on group functions and activities in light of group goals, priorities and the community change that the group desires to see. Community coaching will look different for each coalition, as every coalition has unique goals, objectives and priorities.

Community coaching is different from facilitation and the provision of technical assistance. Community coaches do not guide coalitions to predetermined outcomes, initiate specific changes or advocate for specific actions. Rather, community coaches ask questions that help coalition members reflect on assumptions, think critically about the functioning of the community and encourage the design of interventions intended to create positive changes specific to the community.

Community coaches are typically more focused on coalition processes such as group dynamics, structure and efficiency instead of the actual content of the coalition’s work. Community coaches may focus on coalition and community readiness, visibility in the community, and member roles and relationships with the community. A coach who is involved with an obesity prevention coalition, for example, works with the coalition to implement effective strategies in the community but need not be an expert in nutrition. He/she is not responsible for setting the goals or agenda of the coalition. Instead, a coach encourages a coalition to stay focused on its mission and vision, which helps the group remain strategic about initiating, implementing and sustaining community change.

Community coaches may help a coalition do the following:
- Identify potential partners in the community
- Establish goals and objectives
- Remind the group of its vision
- Develop action plans
- Recognize and celebrate success

A community coach can also help a coalition transition from a needs-based approach, to community change, to an asset or strengths-based approach by doing the following:
- Guiding coalition members through an assessment of strengths and weaknesses
- Encouraging members to consider how they might use their assets to enhance group effectiveness
- Highlighting the assets of coalition members and encouraging them to use those assets to frame solutions to problems
- Encouraging the coalition to consider how it might mobilize the community to address community problems or improve community health
- Helping the coalition grow through problems, see issues and concerns from a broader perspective, and learn from other members and members of the community (Emery et al., 2011)

When To Use a Community Coach

Community coaches usually come to coalitions in one of three ways:
1. A lead organization requests the assistance of a coach in working toward a specific initiative.
2. Grant support for a specific program involves coaching.
3. The coalition determines there is a need for a coach and secures a coach for their efforts.

A coalition may decide to use a coach for any one of the following reasons:
• Loss of momentum
  » A coach can bring new ideas and energy to a coalition.
• Discouragement and negativity
  » A coach can help a coalition recover from setbacks and develop a positive outlook by reminding members of their assets and successes.
• Rapidly changing communities
  » A coach can help a coalition find resources and develop relationships that will increase its capacity.
• New leadership structures
  » A coach can help coalition members recognize the assets of both coalition and community leaders.
• Increased emphasis on impact
  » A coach can enhance a coalition’s efforts to mobilize individuals around community change.
• Increased return on investment
  » A coach can help a coalition recognize and make the most of its assets to generate community change.

Community coaches may attend coalition meetings, participate in subcommittee meetings, or regularly communicate with coalition leaders via email or phone. Coaches may also provide coalitions with monthly or quarterly updates in which they share reflections and thoughts related to the work or progress of the group.

Characteristics of an Effective Community Coach

To be effective, a community coach needs to build a relationship marked by trust and rapport with the coalition with which he/she is working. Community coaches recognize that every voice has value and that every community has assets to shape a better future. They also recognize that community change requires the participation and engagement of all coalition members (Emery et al., 2011). Specific skills that a coach should possess to best engage with a coalition include the following:

• Active listening
• Cultural competence
• Conflict resolution
• Networking
• Goal setting
• Problem solving

Additionally, helpful qualities of a community coach include the following:

• Empathy
• Trustworthiness
• Responsiveness to change
• Team-oriented thoughts and behavior
• Willingness to engage in joint learning

Techniques Commonly Used in Coaching

Community coaches generally do more listening than talking. They are not afraid to use silence, providing coalition members with time to think about the best course of action to take in any given situation. Coaches often respond to questions with thoughtful questions that cause a coalition to reflect on problems, clarify ideal outcomes, consider potential solutions and identify preferred actions.

The Six Rs of Community Coaching (Emery et al., 2011) provide various questions that a coach may explore with members of a coalition. The six topic areas with sample questions are listed below.

1. Coaching for readiness: Is the coalition ready for community change?
2. Coaching for relationships: To what extent are coalition members connected with one another and to others in the community?
3. Coaching for reflection: What is the coalition doing that is working well/not so well? Why are these efforts working/not working?
4. Coaching for results: What has the coalition achieved? What can it achieve?
5. Coaching for reach: How will the coalition leave a lasting impact in the community?
6. Coaching for resilience: Is the coalition making plans for sustainability? Is it is prepared to bounce back from resistance or disappointment?

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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