

Principles of Success

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A generic set of principles for successful coalition development can be quite a challenge to generate in light of the great variation in what is called a 'coalition'. Not only do the definitions of coalition vary (from two agencies joining together in a grant submission through a broad community group with representatives from every sector) but also definitions of coalition 'success vary (i.e. we have succeeded if we get the Chief of Police to join our coalition vs. we have succeeded if we get the Chief of Police fired).

ASSUMPTIONS:

To clarify the principles of success in a brief paper it is necessary to first spell out some of the basic assumptions of the particular approach to coalition building articulated in this model:

1. Ecological approach - individuals are understood in the broadest context of their environment. Thus when examining social problems (i.e. drug abuse, teen pregnancy) always consider the major forces in American life today that impact on the problem including: racism, sexism, class elitism, injustices, and economic maldistribution of resources.
2. Social change - Coalitions are committed to addressing those components of society that require change as opposed to improving ways to adapt to societal ills.
3. Multisectoral-multicultural approaches - Coalitions need to include everyone in a community. The coalitions basic principles must celebrate diversity and must value the multicultural characteristics of their communities. Institutional racism needs to be identified and addressed. In communities of color, empowerment of their own community may precede multicultural efforts.
4. Capacity approach - Coalitions focus on a community's capacities and strengths as well as its deficits and problems. They focus on individuals as citizens rather than clients.

PRINCIPLES:

MISSION AND GOALS

Coalition members will clearly define their shared mission/goals and see to it that the identified goals incorporate the self-interests of the various constituencies. Coalition building requires both a willingness to set aside personal agendas for a common good, and a realistic understanding that addressing the self interests of participants is crucial. Walking the tight rope between these agendas is critical to coalition success.

INCLUSIVE MEMBERSHIP

Membership in coalitions needs to be inclusive, allowing all members of a community who endorse the coalitions mission to join in the coalitions efforts. Inclusive membership will occur only through active recruiting of the two power extremes in the community - the most powerful (business, clergy, city hall, etc.) and the least powerful (neighborhood groups, youth, people of color, the poor, etc.). The geographic boundaries of the coalition will also be decided by those directly involved.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCE

The coalitions organizational functioning and structure must be clear and competent enough so that the coalition can perform basic tasks effectively. This includes:

- a. Effective leadership - coalitions need to have clearly identified leadership structures but also need to share leadership as broadly as possible. Building new leadership is a crucial role for coalitions especially among community groups which have been disenfranchised.

- b. A clear, democratic decision making process is needed which allows for broad input into decisions and for conflict and disagreement to occur and be resolved.
- c. Most broad coalition efforts require experienced staff. The staff must have group and organizational process skills and community development philosophy and skills.
- d. Coalitions need to proceed in a planful manner and thus must develop at least a rudimentary ongoing system of planning.
- e. Active and effective communication among members of the coalition and between the coalition and both the community and outside systems (i.e. the State) is critical.
- f. Mobilization and effective use of resources from within the coalition, and outside, is essential.

ACTION AND ADVOCACY

Successful coalitions take actions that are doable and thus prove their effectiveness to themselves and their communities through concrete results. This often means that coalitions load experiments for success to guarantee early victories that will illustrate to the members and the communities that change can occur. A short agenda of doable tasks also prevents a coalition from spreading itself too thin.

HOPE AND CELEBRATION

Coalition activities need to include fun and must affirm the strengths and joys of the community. Indeed one of the great gifts of effective coalitions to their members and to their communities is the gift of hope that emerges from an optimistic coalition approach that says that most problems can be effectively addressed. Leaders will help emphasize the hope and accomplishments of the coalition and help the coalition celebrate this process.

TIME AND PERSISTENCE

The agendas of broad coalitions that address the quality of life in communities can be overwhelming. The coalition needs to take a long-range view, understanding that the coalitions agenda will take time and persistence. Although some single issue coalitions are defined as short-term efforts, the coalitions described in this model will create the needed societal changes only in longer time frames. Tackling big issues in manageable pieces holds for both long term and short term efforts.

MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

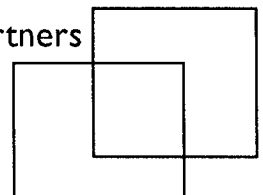
It is obvious that the process of developing a coalition to address quality of life issues in a community is very complex. The literature can provide us with some direction, but each coalition effort must be guided by its own internal review and evaluation process. Whether this review is done at an annual meeting discussion of the coalitions process and outcomes or through a more rigorous evaluation scheme, an effective coalition will have the capacity to learn from its successes and its disappointments, for it surely will have both.

CONCLUSION

The above principles are a 'work in progress'. We hope they can be used as helpful hypotheses to be tested in various communities. We welcome your feedback, suggestions, disagreements and additions.

The above thoughts were partially drawn from the work of Citizens Committee for New York City, Lew Finfer, Herb Shepard, and David Chavis.

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One in a series of tips on building coalitions.