

Why Form a Coalition?

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Introduction

A coalition is two or more organizations that work together to reach a common goal. Usually the goals of a coalition include one of the following: changing or creating public policy, changing or influencing individual behavior or building a healthier community.

When and Why Should You Form or Join a Coalition?

Coalitions tend to be a lot of work and usually take a large commitment of both time and energy. However, sometimes a coalition is needed when an organization realizes it alone does not have the people power or resources to make a real impact on an issue. Some thoughts your organization should analyze before taking steps to form or join a coalition are:

- What might be gained by working together with others?
- Will the advantages be greater than the disadvantages?
- What exactly would you like to achieve?
- How large is the scope of the issue and can a difference be made?
- Will others believe the issue is important?
- Can others help you reach your goal?
- What are you promising to do and can your organization be committed?
- Are the mission and goal statements of all the groups compatible enough to allow all to work together in harmony?

What Are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Coalitions?

There are many advantages to joining or forming a coalition. There are also several disadvantages. Both advantages and disadvantages may be immediate or long term, direct or indirect. It is important that organizations understand that generally the benefits will outweigh the costs of collaborating.

The most common advantages are:

- Potential for professional development
- Improved communication on issues
- Elimination of duplication
- More readily available resources
- Improved public image and communication
- Better needs assessment

Some common disadvantages are:

- Slower decision making
- Turf protection or lack of trust in other organizations or members
- Some limitation to resources
- Unequal commitment from organization members
- Possible lack of focus on the primary issue
- Difficulty finding time to meet
- Not having the right organization representative at the table who can commit to the group and make decisions

Before beginning the process of joining or forming a coalition, carefully consider all the pros and cons. Keep in mind that coalitions are a lot of work. Be sure to fully understand what is expected of you or your organization as a member of the coalition.



*“Individually,
we are one drop.
Together, we are
an ocean.”*

– Ryunosuke Satoro



It is essential that each organization recognize that the benefits will outweigh the cost of collaborating.

Summary

Sometimes we hear the word coalition and we become overwhelmed. We may think it is a group focusing on one issue. Building or joining a coalition is much more than that. Building a coalition should refer to a group working together, discussing a need and then forming a plan to address that need. If you have carefully looked at the advantages and disadvantages and found that the benefits outweigh the costs, maybe it is time to join or form a coalition.

References

Cooperative Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. A Process for Building Coalitions—G90-988-A.

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