

Facilitator's Guide

Why Form a Coalition?

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. —African proverb

Rationale:

Working in partnership with others brings expanded expertise, resources, and networks to any initiative. When addressing difficult and complex community issues, sustained solutions often require the support and investment of many community members. But working in a coalition means giving up some of the credit and control. Working in a coalition is one way to organize to work on shared outcomes, but is it the right way? This guide will help a group reflect on the pressing question: Why form a coalition?

Program Goal:

To help participants determine if a coalition is the preferred way for different groups to collaborate or work together.

Audience:

This facilitated exercise can be used by Cooperative Extension councils, committees, program teams, and different community leadership groups.

Program Objectives:

- To consider the pros and cons of establishing a coalition.
- To identify potential solutions to the challenges related to coalition development.

Pre-Program Preparation:

- Copy the *Why Form a Coalition?* (CLD3-4) KELD fact sheet for each participant.
- Gather as many markers and flip charts as required for the learning activities.

Introduction:

Share: Often community issues can be incredibly complex. Institutions and organizations have time, resources, pride, and identity invested in the work they do. Coalitions may threaten to drain resources, steal identity, and share credit. Yet, coalitions can also leverage resources, multiply impact, reach more audiences, increase publicity, and elevate the visibility of shared issues. This facilitation resource asks community members to consider: *Why form a coalition?*

Objective 1: To consider the pros and cons of establishing a coalition.

Learning Activity 1:

Group Discussion: Do we really need a coalition?

Read *A Community Fable* to the group.

Ask participants to consider the perspectives of the other organizational leadership that have been providing health programs to the community.

- Should the other organizations step aside and let Extension take over all efforts?
- Why or why not?

Possible Outcomes:

Write on the top of a piece of flip chart paper: “Possible Implications of the New Health Grant”

This leadership curriculum was developed by Kentucky Cooperative Extension agents in collaboration with University of Kentucky specialists. Examples in the guide are geared toward a general community audience. This guide may be reproduced or modified for educational or training purposes and used with other audiences.

A Community Fable

Once upon a time in the land of “Localville,” hardworking, committed residents were striving to make their community a better place. In the community, the Cooperative Extension program provided meaningful programming for youth, agriculture, and families, including nutrition education classes. The health department hosted a limited number of programs to assist residents to improve physical health. The police department worked diligently to encourage youth to avoid unhealthy behaviors and drugs. Each organization was respected and valued for the role they played in helping the community become safe, educated, and healthy.

One day the Extension office announced they had just received a very large amount of money! It was a federal grant to provide drug avoidance and healthy living education to all the residents of the county. The struggling community needed to struggle no more, because the Extension system finally had the resources to fix the issues of the community!

Ask the group the following questions and **record** their ideas.

- How might this scenario impact the work of community partners?
- How might this grant impact the police department’s efforts?
- How might this grant impact the health department’s programs?
- How does this grant impact Cooperative Extension’s nutrition programming?

Discuss the implications recorded.

Ask:

- From a public interest perspective, how would you characterize each implication? *Mark positive impacts with a (+) and negative impacts with a (-).*
- What organization would be in the best position to initiate a conversation about collaborative work? Why?
- Looking over the implications we have identified, do you think a coalition would be an important working structure in this situation? Why or Why not?

Objective 2: To identify potential solutions to the challenges related to coalition development.

Learning Activity 2:

Background: This activity can be done using the *A Community Fable* but may be more effective if the participants are considering a coalition in their region. You might use a real local coalition example for this activity.

Share: Forming a coalition can threaten to consume time and realign resources. Coalitions can threaten the focus of organizational efforts and can even include a change in the organization’s identity and focus of purpose. Yet, coalitions can also leverage resources, multiply impact, reach more audiences, increase publicity and elevate the visibility of shared issues. This next exercise asks us to consider: *What are the challenges of forming a coalition?*

Ask participants to form groups of six to eight people per group. Give each group a flip chart and markers.

Appoint a representative from each team to be the recorder. Ask recorders to draw a vertical dividing line down the center of the paper and at the top of the left column write the title: “Challenges of a Coalition.”

Ask groups to discuss and record in the left column of their charts the challenges they anticipate in forming a community coalition (using an example of your choosing or *A Community Fable*). (*If they are struggling, ask about challenges they might anticipate with funding, communication, organization, decision making, involvement, follow-through, etc.*)

Ask teams to stop their work after about eight minutes (or when they have filled their columns).

Share that even though each group created a list of possible challenges to working as a coalition, we know that every challenge has possible solutions.

Ask team recorders to write above the right column of the paper: “Possible Solutions”

Ask participants to take the next eight to ten minutes to discuss and record possible solutions to the challenges they have raised.

Ask teams to report once the energy of the groups begins to ebb (at 8-10 minutes).

(You might do this round robin, asking each table to share one challenge. You can create a master list of challenges by asking each team to report one that has not been mentioned yet. Once you have a master challenges list, ask the teams to share their solutions. You might have more than one possible solution to a challenge.)

Ask the group, in closing:

- Do you believe the solutions we have identified are realistic? Why or why not?
- Would the solutions fully address the challenges of creating a coalition?
- What additional questions would you like to have addressed before determining if a coalition would be worth the investment?

Summary:

This guide was developed to explore the question: *Why form a coalition?* The activities should help facilitate discussion around the advantages and disadvantages of coalition development as well as the challenges and possible solutions of coalition formation. Coalition development is not a solution for every community initiative, but through this evaluative work, community groups can plan and design coalitions to effectively address community initiatives.

Developed by: Dan Kahl, Community and Leadership Development
