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G90-988 A Process for Building Coalitions

Georgia L. Stevens
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, gstevens1@unl.edu

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NebGuide

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A Process for Building Coalitions

What should you consider in building coalitions? This NebGuide offers guidelines.

Dr. Georgia L. Stevens, Extension Family Economics Policy Specialist

- What is a Coalition?
- The Value of Coalitions
- Analyze Your Own Organization Before You Begin
- If You Join a Coalition, What Are You Promising?
- Getting Started with a Plan
- References
- How to Organize A Coalition Worksheet
- Organization Fact Sheet

What is a Coalition?

A coalition is a group of organizations and individuals working together for a common purpose. There are two types of coalitions:

1. "One issue" or event coalitions only have to agree on one particular issue. The coalition is dissolved when the issue has been solved or the event has been coordinated.

2. "Multi issues" coalitions have related issues, such as nutrition and health, child care needs, elderly health care, or the environment. This more permanent type of coalition recognizes the value of mobilizing together for action over a longer time. To be effective the "multi issues" coalition should have a date set for work to be completed. The coalition can always be reorganized if there is still a need.

The Value of Coalitions

Coalition building is needed when one organization recognizes it alone does not have the technical capability or people power to have a real impact on an issue.

Today's issues often are complex; audiences are larger. Often to accomplish a goal, representation must be broadened to include nontraditional vested-interest groups that have larger roles in local, state, and

national policymaking. Coalitions assist in:

- setting priorities for action,
- helping to identify specific data and informational needs from other groups and agencies,
- carrying out the educational plan,
- broadening the development of new audiences,
- reporting the results of coalition activities through media,
- improving the educator's capacity for providing information to citizens, interest groups, and policy-makers.

Sometimes when people hear the word "coalition" they think of groups that have rallied around one issue because they hold similar strong opinions on that issue. That is not how "coalition" is used here.

In this NebGuide, building a coalition refers to bringing groups together to discuss a possible issue or need *before* strong opinions have formed. An example might be representatives of many different organizations in a community coming together to explore the various alternatives for issues in their area.

Analyze Your Own Organization Before You Begin

The self-interests of your own organization should be analyzed *before* asking other groups to join a coalition. Ask yourselves these questions:

- what can be gained from joining with others?
- will the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?
- how can we best communicate the demands of other groups to our members?

If You Join a Coalition, What Are You Promising?

Troubleshooting problems as an ongoing effort increases the chances for successful coalition building. The following rules for commitment should help keep all groups on the same track.

- Each organization must be committed to the problem.
- Each organization must be committed to coordinate to solve the problem, not just gain public recognition.
- Each organization must be committed to the belief that every other organization has the right to be involved.
- Each organization must be committed to open communication.
- Each organization must be committed to coalition recognition, not individual recognition.

Getting Started with a Plan

Certain tasks must be carried out by a coalition, regardless of the type, in order for it to function efficiently. These include:

- naming a facilitator;
- obtaining commitment from members;
- assessing needs and gathering background data;
- writing a mission statement;
- determining short or long-term objectives;
- evaluating the work as the coalition progresses;

- exploring opportunities for additional funding;
- carrying out the plan using appropriate merchandising and evaluation techniques;
- determining ways to orient new members;
- finding rewards for coalition members.

As the issue evolves and alternatives are explored, it is essential for coalitions to represent all sides of the issue. Bringing key decision makers into the coalition at the beginning gets them interested in the issue and helps keep the issue alive through a more constant visibility with community leadership and the press. Individual contact with decision makers throughout helps identify opposition and support.

Involving key decision makers gives creditability to the project chosen for implementation.

Group dynamics demand you analyze how many group representatives can work together in a coalition. Usually a group of 9-11 people works best together.

Choose a name for the group that describes the coalition and can be useful in publicizing activities. Try to provide some training in organizational maintenance, such as setting up a meeting agenda, using minutes to keep members informed, and maintaining a scrapbook that lets new people know about previous efforts. These help to keep the coalition functioning.

Coalition building should enhance image, save time, result in better service and a higher quality of product for clientele, and promote the innovation of new programs.

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Hahn, A. J., Resolving Public Issues and Concerns Through Policy Education. Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cornell University, 1988.

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How to Organize A Coalition Worksheet

1. ***Bring interested groups together***.

   Carefully select those groups that will be invited to meet together. Identify yourself as first meeting facilitator in the initial call or letter. (It is anticipated that a facilitator will be elected at the first meeting. You may wish to make that clear to those attending when you write or call them.)

Ask each individual to come prepared by bringing their address card file, appropriate newsletters, organization membership books that include their mission statements and plans for action, and telephone books for agency phone numbers.

2. ***Work through a team building exercise.***

   Pair those attending with someone they don't know. Ask them to introduce themselves briefly by telling the other person at least one and no more than three groups they belong to, and a skill or talent they have. Ask each pair to introduce their partner using the other person's name, where that person is from, groups the person belongs to, and a skill or talent the person possesses. Comment on the number of groups mentioned, the various skills named, and how this is a beginning to build an effective coalition.

3. ***Conduct a brainstorming activity to finalize list of participants.***

   Before the meeting, list the following types of organizations on separate sheets of a newsprint pad:

   - *Service*
   - *Religious*
   - *Issue Organizations*
   - *Social*
   - *Educational*
   - *Councils, boards, local, statewide*

   Review the brainstorming rules that all ideas should be listed and no criticism should be made of any of these ideas. Use a newsprint pad, marker, and ask for a "recorder."

   Open brainstorming and note answers on appropriate newsprint sheets. Ask:
   - *Who is involved?*
   - *Who might gain? Who might lose?*
   - *Who controls the resources that could help resolve the issue?*
   - *Who has the power to affect the issue?*
   - *Who else should be asked to join?*

4. ***Hand out Organization Fact Sheet***

   Ask someone familiar with each group to start filling out a fact sheet for the group. Ask for volunteers to locate information for fact sheets on the groups who did not have a fact sheet completed during the meeting. Return all fact sheets to the facilitator for typing and distribution to members.

5. ***Develop a mission statement for the coalition.***

   Begin to outline the mission of this coalition. The facilitator may need to further develop the statement and send it to attendees for comments at the second meeting.

6. ***Determine which other groups will be invited to the next meeting.***

   Evaluate other organizations that would or would not support your issue. Knowing supporters and potential non-supporters helps the coalition develop a strategy.

7. ***Elect a facilitator for future meetings, and develop an agenda.***

Identify who will continue as facilitator. The facilitator should offer to invite other organizations to join in the coalition at the next meeting. When inviting groups to join the coalition, define the issue in a way that appeals to their self-interest. Make committee assignments to coordinate an agenda for the next "real" meeting of the coalition.

Organization Fact Sheet

1. _____
Name of Organization Type of Organization

2._____
Leader's Name Address Phone

3. Purpose or objectives of organization:

4. Membership qualifications for organization:

5. Local, state, national or international structure:

6. Communities served by organization and numbers involved:

7. How does the organization acquire its funds? (Member dues, donations, government or agency funding, grants, other).

8. Examples of types of projects the organization has sponsored:

9. Organization's stand on issues. (Please specify issues)

a. Were they controversial?

b. Did they lobby for elected officials? Who?

c. Did they join with other groups to work on common concerns? Which concerns and which groups?

Your Opinion: Your Name, Address, Phone _____

_____

_____

10. Will the organization listed on line #1 support our issue?

11. What can this organization contribute to our coalition?

12. Do you see potential problems if this organization joins the coalition?

13. Should the organization be asked to join this coalition? Please explain.

Adapted from Family Community Leadership Project materials by Dr. Georgia L. Stevens, Family Economics Policy Specialist, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, 3/90.

Note: Copying these fact sheets on different colored paper for various coalitions and filing in a permanent file saves time.

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