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# Building a Coalition: Investing in Health!

Coalitions, partnerships, and strategic alliances are buzzwords in public health. But building a coalition or partnership from scratch can be a daunting task. When is the right time to build a coalition? How are coalitions started? How are coalitions maintained and sustained? Let's start from the beginning: What is a coalition?

A coalition is a collection of diverse people or organizations that work together to achieve a common goal. Coalitions bring community stakeholders together to tackle important topics. Coalitions work because they pool resources, talents, and expertise to achieve more than any single person or organization can. Think about building a coalition like building a campfire: You need the right conditions, ingredients, and care and attention to maintain and sustain the fire.

Once your community chooses an issue, the next step is to determine whether or not it's the right time, place, and context to build a coalition. Use a [SWOT Analysis](#) to identify strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats to starting a coalition. A SWOT analysis will also help you understand your community's specific assets and needs. After the SWOT analysis, complete a checklist – [“Is a Coalition Right for You?”](#) – with your steering committee. These first two steps will help you determine if it's the right time to start a coalition.

## If I Build It, Will They Come?

If building a coalition is right for your community, you need some simple ingredients. According to Dr. Fran Butterfoss, an expert on coalitions, building a coalition requires:

- Purpose, vision, and mission
- Supportive organizational structure
- Diverse coalition members
- Strong leadership

**A clear purpose, vision, and mission** enhances collaboration, brings awareness to the coalition, helps to recruit members, and reduces conflict and duplication of efforts. Check out the [Mission, Vision, Goals](#) document on the [SOPHE](#) website to get started.

**The organizational structure** refers to the administrative, internal processes that govern how the coalition functions. Understanding the structure of the coalition is important for keeping on task, but the structure shouldn't be so complex that it keeps the coalition from achieving its goals. Creating a [Bylaws Document](#) with your steering committee is a good way to get started with organizational structure.

**Diverse coalition membership** is critical to carrying out any coalition's goals. The coalition should be reflective of the dynamic and diverse community that it serves. To ensure that your coalition has inclusive membership, try using the [Buddy Method for Recruitment](#).

**Effective leaders** are able to facilitate productive interactions between a diverse set of coalition members, cut conflict, overcome barriers, and create space for innovating thinking, ideas, and action. Collaborative leadership is especially important for coalitions, where members are active participants and shared power is encouraged. To find out if you are the right kind of leader for your coalition, take the [Transformational Leader Quiz](#).

## Plan, Action, Plan ... Repeat!

Now that we have ingredients to build our coalition, it's time to get to work. The first action item is community assessment.

**Community assessment is the process of understanding the needs, capabilities, and assets of your community.** The community assessment planning process helps garner support from coalition members and community stakeholders. The assessment should result in a community action plan. A community action plan has six major steps, according to the National Resource Center:

1. Define the scope
2. Collaborate
3. Collect data
4. Determine key findings
5. Set priorities and create an action plan
6. Share your findings

The National Resource Center's [Community Assessment Guide](#) defines each step and provides resources for getting the job done. Now the fun part – carry out your action plan.

Once the action plan is implemented, create a coalition sustainability plan to ensure that your work doesn't lose momentum. The sustainability process can be mapped out using the Centers for Disease Control's [Sustainability Planning Guide](#).

A critical component of sustainability is evaluation. Evaluation features six steps, according to the [CDC guide](#): engage stakeholders, describe the program, focus the evaluation design, gather credible evidence, justify conclusions, and ensure use and share lessons learned. Choose the simplest evaluation plan that meets your needs. The [Community Tool Box](#) developed by the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas is a user-friendly guide that can help you get started with your evaluation planning.

These are the resources needed to start a high-functioning, sustainable coalition. For a full list of resources, see Butterfoss's "Coalitions and Partnerships in Community Health." Much of the material here was adapted from "Ignite!," a shortened version of that book. For more information about getting a coalition started in Indiana, visit the [Coalition Trip](#) website.

## Suggested Resources

Butterfoss, F.D. (2013). "Ignite!" Author House.

Butterfoss, F.D. (2007). "Coalitions and Partnerships in Community Health." John Wiley & Sons.

Coalition Trip. Indiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute. Web. <https://coalitiontrip.indianactsi.org/what-we-do/>

SOPHE (2022). "Coalition Building Resources" Society for Public Health Education. Web. <https://elearn.sophe.org/coalition-building-resources>

- [Is a Coalition Right for You?](#)
- [Mission, Vision, Goals](#)
- [Bylaws Document](#)
- [Buddy Method for Recruitment](#)
- [Transformational Leader Quiz](#)

[Community Assessment Guide](#). Compassion Capital Fund National Resource Center (NRC). "Conducting a Community Assessment". Web. [https://ananlcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/1\\_Community\\_Assessment.pdf](https://ananlcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/1_Community_Assessment.pdf)

Indiana Active Coalition Map 2020-2021. [https://puext.in/2021\\_Health\\_Coalition\\_Map](https://puext.in/2021_Health_Coalition_Map)

[Sustainability Planning Guide](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "A Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities". Web. [https://www.cdc.gov/nccddph/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/pdf/sustainability\\_guide.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nccddph/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/pdf/sustainability_guide.pdf)

[SWOT Analysis](#). Adapted from Venngage, INC. Web. <https://venngage.com/blog/swot-analysis-templates/>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Evaluation Steps". Web. <https://www.cdc.gov/eval/steps/index.htm>.

The Community Tool Box. 2021. Table of Contents. University of Kansas. Web. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en>