

A series of technical assistance  
manuals for community coalitions

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# STRATEGIZER

## Coalitions 101: Getting Started



# Coalition Building 101

## Part I: Starting a Coalition

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*Written and Developed by Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America*

### INTRODUCTION:

Building a coalition is not an easy task. It takes perseverance, compromise, patience and long-term commitment. The coalition leader(s) will need brokering skills (to keep everyone together and on the same page), charisma (to sell the mission to the community), fund-raising expertise (to generate the resources that will be needed to keep staff and programs afloat) and courage. A sense of idealism tempered by old-fashioned stick-to-itism won't hurt, either.

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America supports Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey's goal of dramatically increasing the number of community coalitions by the year 2000. To help communities who are in the beginning stages of coalition development, CADCA has compiled a number of lessons and strategies learned in the field through our technical assistance efforts of the past five years. Feel free to draw on them at will, and good luck in your new coalition!

### SEVEN STEPS TO COALITION LIFTOFF

Coalitions form at the local level when grassroots groups seek safety or power in numbers. They may form when a tragic event such as a drunk driving accident occurs or when opportunities for new funding arise or cutbacks necessitate cooperation or consolidation. The basic idea is that "working together can move us forward." However, the challenges to actually making this happen are enormous. In truth, collaboration is not always easy . . . because of turf issues, personalities, group dynamics, power and status. To get you started on the right track, CADCA has identified seven steps to follow in the initial stages of coalition development to help make the collaboration process less of a challenge. These steps are listed at right and discussed in greater detail on the following pages.

#### **SEVEN STEPS TO FORMING A COMMUNITY COALITION:**

- 1. Define the Problem and its Impact on the Community.**
- 2. Identify Key Stakeholders.**
- 3. Convene a Meeting.**
- 4. Share Perspectives.**
- 5. Discuss the Current Reality and the Ideal.**
- 6. Create a Vision for Your Community.**
- 7. Determine the Next Steps.**

# The Nature of the Problem

NON USE

USE

MISUSE

ABUSE

CHEMICAL  
DEPENDENCY

RECOVERING  
INDIVIDUAL

## STEP 1. DEFINE THE PROBLEM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

In order to begin to address the problem of substance abuse in a community, it is essential to know the scope and nature of the problem in the community: Who is using drugs? What kinds of drugs are being used? Has there been a recent increase or decrease in drug abuse? Was the change caused by a community event? What are the specific negative effects felt by the community due to drug use? Has an event occurred which has brought more attention to this issue? Answering these questions are a part of the first step in addressing drug use in your community.

This step is intended to offer a number of different ways in which a community coalition can collect data about the problem and use this information to begin to formulate a plan to address the problem. ***It is suggested that you use as many sources of information as possible and that the investigation be done with the goal of targeting resources and problems to meet your community's needs.***

CADCA's Practical Theorist 3, "Assessing Drug Abuse Within and Across Communities" outlines ways to establish Community Epidemiology Surveillance Networks. These networks have proven successful across the country in detecting emerging drug abuse problems and in assessing local patterns and trends. Keep in mind that assessing the actual effect of the drug abuse problem in your community is a very challenging task and must go beyond mere anecdotal evidence in order for the next step — strategic planning — to be effective.

Sometimes it helps to broaden the perspective of those who will be part of the coalition by looking at a continuum of the nature of the problem of substance abuse, which extends from non-use to recovery.

- **Non-users** are a small part of the population — thought to be 10 % or fewer. They are usually silent about their attitudes, which often derive from religious teachings or from personal experience as a victim of substance abuse.

- **Drug users.** 90 percent of adolescents try alcohol or some other drug at least once before they leave high school (in this category, everything counts -- even that sip of champagne at home with the family)
- **Drug abusers.** Those who use alcohol and/or drug to change how one feels constitute 50 percent of the youth in this country. They do it for many reasons. Peer pressure is a big part of it, so much so that "party" is not longer a noun and a place. It's a verb among contemporary youth and it is synonymous with use and abuse of alcohol and drugs.
- **Chemical dependency.** Now we are talking about addiction, about a brain disease as identified by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) whose research has advanced to the point of being able to actually see and record a brain on drugs. Research has also linked a predisposition to addiction that is similar to the predisposition risk factor of diabetes. If one of your parents develops adult onset diabetes, your chance of inheriting that predisposition is 50/50. Addiction is much the same. If both of your parents are addicted, your chance of inheriting the risk is 90 percent.
- **Recovering individuals.** These are individuals who have made a commitment to stop their drug use. They need a lot of support and encouragement.

### Checklist for Step 1:

- ✓ Identify specific events that have recently heightened awareness of the problem within your community
- ✓ Identify key sources of data about the problem
- ✓ Develop a list of individuals and groups in the community who are affected by the coalition's main issue: substance abuse
- ✓ Determine if the proposed coalition will augment, rather than duplicate, the efforts of potential members
- ✓ Target existing and potential resources for launching the effort.

## “Coalitions Can Be Exciting Experiments in Social Change...”

### STEP 2. IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

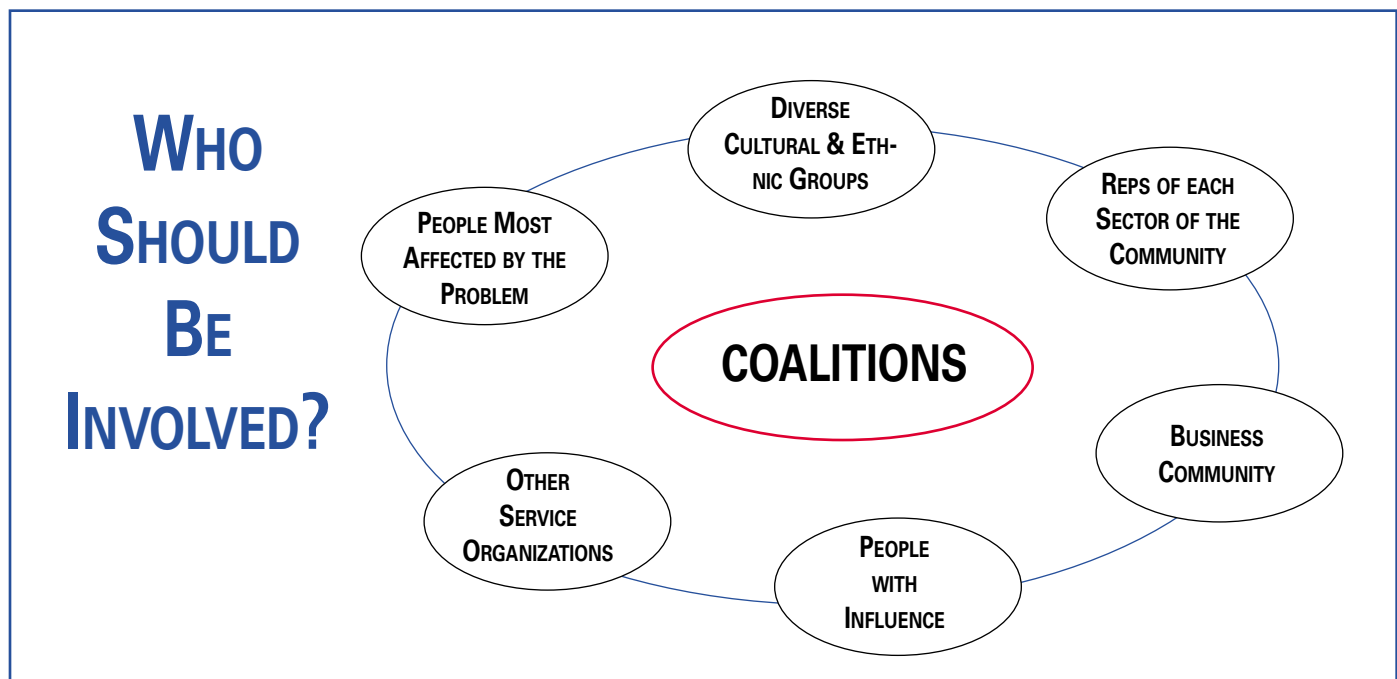
Now that you have begun to define the drug abuse problem in your community you have a better idea of what you are confronting. It is time to select those individuals and groups to help accomplish your mission.

The resources, individuals and agencies that are your resources for defining the problem are also your first leads in establishing a coalition of committed and affected individuals. Coalitions need to involve:

- representatives from each sector of the community;
- diverse cultural and ethnic groups;
- people with influence in the community;
- people most affected by the problem;
- business community;
- service organizations.

Answering the following questions will help you to bring together a dynamic group of people who can help confront the drug problem.

- In your assessment of your community’s needs did you uncover a specific area that needs to be focused on with greater intensity?
- Is your target population youth? If so, you should have coaches, teachers, school administrators, recreation center representatives and other individuals who have a vested interest in your target population.
- Are there specific geographic areas that need to be given more attention than others? Are there community leaders from the particular area involved in your coalition?
- Finally, who makes things happen in your community? Some of these individuals may be elected or selected in some way. Others may have no such identity but without them, nothing of real importance in your community happens. These are among the first people you



need to engage in this effort. If you have no entré with some of these individuals, find out who does and enlist their help. You **MUST** have the key leadership of the community involved to make the coalition a success. And do your homework. If you know the position of key leaders on this issue before you contact them, you'll be better equipped to convince them that they should contribute to the efforts of the coalition.

### **Checklist for STEP 2:**

- ✓ Develop a list of groups currently working on the issue as well as a list of which groups will benefit from coalition actions
- ✓ Involve key community leaders and their representatives
- ✓ Invite individuals who are interested in using their leadership abilities to address this issue.

## **STEP 3. CONVENE A MEETING**

Schedule your meeting in the evening in a recognizable neighborhood facility such as a church, recreation center or school. Promote attendance at the meeting at least two weeks before the date and offer childcare.

Make sure you have a sign-in sheet giving name, address and phone number. Choose a facilitator who can keep the pace of the meeting moving, will remain focused on the meeting objectives, can act as mediator in case of controversy and will treat everyone in attendance with respect.

Proceed with the attitude that no comment or idea is silly (unless racially bigoted or favoring violence). Designate someone to record every concern and/or solution that is mentioned.

Do not become discouraged if only a handful of people attend. Analyze the reasons for low attendance and make adjustments for the next meeting.

### **Checklist for Step 3:**

- ✓ Have you selected convenient meeting times and places?
- ✓ Have you instituted decision-making procedures that include:
  - consensus,
  - democratic voting,
  - working consensus
  - organizational vetoes
  - weighted decisions?
- ✓ Is the purpose of the meeting clear?

## **STEP 4. SHARE PERSPECTIVES**

Coalition building can be like a time bomb waiting to go off in a community. At the first meeting various perspectives about the causes of drug use and how to solve the problem must be shared. The coalition convener should be prepared to hear a number of them and facilitate a discussion that allows everyone to be heard, while framing the comments to help in the formation of problem statements and, ultimately, a vision for the community.

Substance abuse effects everyone, in every community, and in a number of very different ways. As you begin a coalition it is important to learn about the people who may be involved and their unique perspectives.

For example, there are those who believe this is exclusively an issue of crime and punishment. Perhaps they lost a close friend or relative to a drunken driving accident. Perhaps a family member was victimized by an addict seeking money to buy drugs.

At the other end of the continuum are those who see this problem of substance abuse purely as a disease of addiction. These individuals will talk of treatments for sick people needing to get well rather than of bad people needing punishment.

And, of course, there are many people with varying attitudes in-between. What keeps people apart is that each has had only one "slice" of experience and, thus,

***“Create a clear statement of how you would ‘prefer’ the issue to look in your community ... You have to know where you are going before you can develop a plan to get there.”***

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while each person’s attitudes are right, they are probably incomplete. This is one of the real strengths of a coalition – the bringing together of many people with many different experiences so that, in the end, they can collectively formulate a vision that is accurate and meaningful.

This won’t necessarily happen easily. It will take some telling of personal anecdotes and perhaps some shouting and conflict and a lot of compromise. People don’t easily agree on what should be done about the substance abuse problem in this country or in their communities.

What the facilitator must do is enable people to see that everyone in the room has the “correct” attitude, no matter how far apart they may seem to be in their perspective. Each person’s experience is true and, for that individual, it is reality.

Remember all the different points of view that are represented. These will be reflected even in the definition of words that you may think are universally understood. It is important to remember that everyone must be flexible in sharing their perspectives. It takes some real work for a coalition of individuals to achieve the same goals.

### ***Checklist for Step 4:***

- ✓ Are the member organizations’ ideological principles compatible with those of the coalition?
- ✓ Will opportunities for cultural sharing be built into the coalition’s ongoing activities?
- ✓ Have members of the coalition been offered training in dealing with stereotypes and inter-group tensions?

## **STEP 5. DISCUSS THE CURRENT REALITY AS WELL AS THE IDEAL**

What is the substance abuse reality in your community? What does it look like? What drugs are being used in your community? Who is using them? Where are drugs sold and used? You’ll paint this picture using both hard and soft data. The hard data involves statistics, survey and other epidemiologic results (from Step 1.) The soft data reflect what the coalition members and the community believe and see is going on. Both have equal importance to understanding the scope of the problem.

Craft a clear statement of how you would “prefer” the issue to look in your community. Communities often have a difficult time drawing a clear picture of where they want to go. It’s not enough to simply say: “We want to end alcohol and drug abuse in our community.” That’s too broad, and it isn’t going to happen. What would your community like to be known for? What would your neighborhood be proud of? Make a checklist and winnow it down to 10 or 15 goals. You have to know where you are going before you can develop a plan to get there.

### ***Checklist for Step 5:***

- ✓ Determine the following:
  - ideal situation
  - present reality
  - differences between the ideal and the reality
  - the key issue of why the coalition was formed without adding other issues
- ✓ Make sure that the following procedures are utilized for making coalition decisions: consensus, democratic voting, and organizational vetoes.

## STEP 6. CREATE A VISION FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Unlike prior methods of organization planning, visioning begins with the future, not the present. It focuses on the end state, not the means of getting there. The description of that exciting, ideal end-state is called a vision statement.

Your coalition's vision statement should indicate what your group is striving to achieve. The statement stays intact until the goal is achieved or until environmental factors or the stakeholders' needs change.

***A vision statement should always be positive and inspirational.***

The vision statement paints the big picture: where the organization is now, and where it needs to be going. The statement should provide a framework for decision making. Its inspirational nature helps to develop team spirit and to empower the organization.

A vision is not a plan. A vision is knowing what you want to do. The "how to" comes later. In other words, a plan is a roadmap showing how to get from point A to point B. But a vision is a video depiction of your destination in full color, sunset over the water and all. You'll deal with the plane reservation and hotel accommodations -- the plan -- later.

***Here's what the vision statement does:***

- ***It is a statement that says what the organization is striving to become - what isn't working today.***
- ***It describes the ultimate goal, the end state***
- ***It remains in place until achieved or until environmental factors and/or stakeholders needs change***
- ***Its language is inspirational***

***Checklist for Step 6:***

- ✓ Create a vision statement that is:
  - written in the present tense
  - positive
  - inspirational

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**The vision statement:**

- **describes the ultimate goal**
  - **allows the big picture to be seen**
  - **empowers the organization**
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## STEP 7. DETERMINE THE NEXT STEPS

You've gotten everyone to the table. You've discussed perception versus reality and forged an inspirational vision statement. A lot of important work has taken place! Now, don't let them walk away or simply fall over from inertia. Be sure everyone knows what is to be done next and establish a timetable for accomplishing it. Set a date for the next meeting now. The next logical step is called strategic planning -- something that needn't be as intimidating as it may sound.

***The final checklist:***

- ✓ Have you established the purpose of your strategic planning committee?
- ✓ Have you delineated the rules of participation? (i.e. commitment, time and responsibilities)
- ✓ Have you identified sufficient data resources and educated those involved on the issue?
- ✓ What services are available now? Are those organizations or representatives involved?
- ✓ Who is missing? Will they be invited to the next meeting?
- ✓ What gaps emerged from your discussion of the ideal and the current reality? Who needs to be involved to help fill these gaps?

## MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM

The coalition leader(s) must remind themselves that while coalitions are very useful in eliminating wasteful duplication of effort and in coalescing the commitment to the mission, they are not, after all, re-inventing the wheel. People in the community have been dealing with these issues for many years. If you think you are bringing them a new invention called a coalition that will solve the problem of drug abuse once and for all, you may not only offend them and their past efforts, you may have lost them.

You must validate the history and the contributions of all the players. Any individual committed to helping his or her community deserves appreciation and honor. And second, the current community leaders have a lot of knowledge and expertise you will need to successfully launch the coalition.

The underlying definition of a coalition is “more.” You’re asking for more time, more energy, more effort than the coalition members are already giving. At the

very least, it is one more meeting. Make it worth their while.

Don’t assume that the people who are there to organize a coalition will leave their own personal agendas at the door. Often, the opposite is true and your task, as coalition leader and facilitator, is to identify those agendas, get them out on the table, and find ways to address them. If the coalition effort isn’t about forwarding the agendas of these individuals, they wouldn’t be there.

Sometimes there are crises in the community that unleash tidal waves of momentum. Use it. Capitalize on it. Conflict and crisis are not all bad and cannot be avoided in any event.

***Never lose sight of the fact that changing and organizing a community takes time, effort and perseverance. But the rewards are worth it!***

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America is a membership-driven organization put in place to give anti-drug and drug-related violence coalitions technical assistance and support.

The purpose of the *Strategizer Technical Assistance Manuals* is to provide step-by-step guidance on various topics relevant to the work you do in your community each day. We know you are busy, so *Strategizers* are designed to be easy-to-use guides that help to streamline the planning process.

*Strategizers* cover such topics as long-range planning, board and staff development, development of media strategies, marketing planning, fund-raising for coalition operations and programs, methods for engaging hard-to-

reach populations, and more. For a current list of *Strategizer Technical Assistance Manuals* or for additional technical assistance on the topic covered in this *Strategizer*, contact the CADCA staff by writing to:

901 North Pitt Street, Suite 300  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

or call toll-free: 1-800-54-CADCA

Please notify CADCA regarding the technical assistance needs you may have. Your coalition is on the front line against the ravages of drugs, alcohol and violence.

Keep up the good work!