

## **Community Empowerment & Coalition**

### **A CALL FOR ACTION!**

Associations are formed by groups of people in order to support and promote their common interests. Their activities are focussed on their own needs and, whatever goes on within other organisations is generally of little consequence to their own groups.

For instance, there are a number of groups representing senior citizens of the nation, all of them busily pursuing and achieving their own goals. It is a very successful system that has been tested over a long period of time and has proven its worth.

There are times, however, when disastrous events occur which affect a broad range of people, even the whole nation, yet these events are not being addressed by any of these organizations even though their own members are affected the most. Why?

- Maybe because we are not used to look outside our own areas of activity and leave anything out of the ordinary to others.
- Maybe because there is a false belief that these events are beyond our control and that we can do nothing to prevent them from occurring.

What I am referring to here is corporate crime which robs people of their savings whilst allowing the perpetrators to get away with millions.

To be more correct, these crooks are usually left penniless and bankrupt, their wives, however, suddenly acquire multi-million dollar mansions which they are legally entitled to.

This in itself is bad enough, but the flow-on effect of loss of confidence by investors makes it much worse resulting in erosion of stock market values, this affecting every investor regardless of whether they are big or small.

Insurance companies lost millions as values of their investment portfolios tumbled, which they are recouping by raising premiums. Every worker gets super, much of which is invested in shares - which lose value. Trust funds and annuities are losing their investors' savings.

Why is this allowed to go on? Why isn't the government doing something about it? The answer may well be because we shut up and put up.

You would think that the seniors' groups would get up in arms and demand that government bring in tougher legislation with tougher penalties.

There is no evidence of any such activity and, so long as we are prepared to accept this situation, nothing will be done. When you think of it - we are all affected, including pensioners.

How come pensioners you would say? Not directly, but with collateral damage.

As the self-funded retirees lose a lot of their savings they will go on to the pension scheme soaking up the scarce welfare dollars. This will have serious consequences for all of the welfare services, which are necessary for the pensioners' existence.

The solution to this major problem may not be as difficult as all that.

What we need to do is to get together and with one single voice DEMAND that the government bring in legislation to curb the corporate crooks.

Together we have huge numbers that no government would dare to ignore, and there is no doubt that we will succeed because our cause is just.

Alec Malikoff (2002)

President, Brisbane South Branch (retired).

### **Community Coalition (Empowerment)**

*"Community coalitions are comprised of various groups working together to fix a problem. It's all about neighborhoods empowering themselves"*

George Johnson, Coalition volunteer, North Carolina

## **SEVEN STEPS TO COALITION LIFT OFF**

Most coalitions begin when a small (or large) group of individuals in a community come together in response to a local problem. For example, perhaps a neighborhood group has identified the need for more after-school programs in the hopes of keeping kids off the street corners. Or perhaps a drunk driving incident or crash has occurred once too often on the same corner.

Starting a coalition is not an easy task, but you don't have to feel like Christopher Columbus sailing into uncharted waters. Thousands have gone before you, and they have advice to share.

While your new coalition may be working on problems other than substance abuse, the wisdom of these steps will still be invaluable in your coalition-building efforts.

### **Seven Steps to Coalition Lift Off**

Step 1. Define the Problem and Its Impact on the Community

Step 2. Identify Key Stakeholders.

Step 3. Convene a Meeting.

Step 4. Share Perspectives.

Step 5. Discuss Both the Current Reality and Your Hopes for the Future

Step 6. Create a Vision for Your Community

Step 7. Determine the Next Steps

Step 1. Define the Problem and Its Impact on the Community

You need to establish factually that there is a problem. Anecdotal evidence is not sufficient. Gather quantifiable information from reputable local sources that will help you throughout the work of your coalition.

For example, if you are concerned about teen drug use in your neighborhood, talk to law enforcement agencies about teen arrest patterns, and talk to hospitals about ER admittance statistics.

And don't just look for bad news. Ask school administrators about drug education programs; and check with social service agencies to learn about their success rates in rehabilitation. All these resources of information become your potential coalition colleagues.

Step 2. Identify Key Stakeholders.

You need to recruit representatives from all of the following constituencies: people most affected by the problem as many sectors of the community as possible (youth, adults, seniors, diverse cultural and ethnic groups, etc.)

- the business community
- service organizations
- law enforcement agencies
- faith-based groups
- educational institutions

The wider your circle of membership, the wider your sphere of influence will be.

Step 3. Convene a Meeting.

Set up a public meeting in a friendly place (a school or church is ideal) and invite any and all interested parties to attend. Be sure to articulate the shared concerns and to define the problem in local, specific terms. For example, no coalition can solve the worldwide problem of tobacco use among minors, but a local coalition just might have success reducing the number of businesses who will sell tobacco to minors.

Step 4. Share Perspectives.

Consider dividing up for brainstorming discussions in smaller groups of shared concern or interests. For example, put all the faith groups at one table, and all the business people at another.

Have the groups reconvene and share the ideas they've come up with. The youth groups might come back to the larger group with the suggestion that a Youth Dialogue Day be held on which business leaders meet with a sampling of kids just to hear the kids talk. The local business people might agree to pass out coalition-created brochures to each customer they serve; large companies might agree to insert notices promoting your cause in their monthly statements.

#### Step 5. Discuss Both the Current Reality and Your Hopes for the Future

Coalitions need to be realistic. While seeking to rid a neighborhood of all crime is a lofty goal, it is unlikely to be a possible reality. Right from the beginning, your coalition needs to be realistic about what exists and what is possible.

Try at your very first meeting to craft a clear statement of how you would "prefer" the problem to look in your community. Then articulate specific goals you seek to accomplish by making a needs assessment of the situation. Don't bite off more than you can chew!

#### Step 6. Create a Vision for Your Community

Your coalition's vision statement needs to be positive, future-oriented, and realistic. This statement is not a plan with defined steps. In the early stage, your coalition needs to concentrate on defining itself as a collective with a purpose.

Take time to build the organization of your coalition before you begin to attack the community problem. Too often groups get impatient and want to start right away to "do" something. This is a mistake. Instead, do the spade work of research—in your community, in the library, on the internet.

#### Step 7. Determine the Next Steps

The next step is strategic planning—a time-intensive and laborious task. Be sure to end your first meeting with assignments for every attendee. Identify who will do what, and by when. Set the next meeting date, and make sure everyone understands not only their assignment, but also how the assigned tasks fit into the larger picture.

-----  
The Seven Steps to Coalition Lift Off are adapted from the expertise amassed by CADCA, Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America. (See Coalitions 101: Getting Started in Strategizer 29, a technical assistance manual published by CADCA)

Visit the web site of this nationwide organization of coalitions at [www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org) for more information on how other coalitions are working.

Improving your coalition >>

*"Coalitions offer an opportunity for anybody and everybody to be involved. Without the cooperation of so many businesses, groups, and individuals, we would never be able to achieve our coalition's goals."*

*Rhonda Ramsey Molina, Executive Director*

## **SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

Accountability can be defined as the obligation of power-holders to account for or take responsibility for their actions. Social Accountability is an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, in which ordinary citizens, communities, civil society organizations and/or the media participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability.

SA mechanisms are hence demand-driven, and operate from the bottom-up. They are also sometimes referred to as "external" or "vertical" mechanisms of accountability, in contrast to more conventional "horizontal" mechanisms of accountability that are internal to the state. One important "vertical" mechanism of accountability in democratic states is elections. SA is here used to refer to the broad range of actions and mechanisms (beyond voting) that citizens, communities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and independent media can use to hold government officials and bureaucrats accountable.

### **Social Accountability Building Blocks**

A broad range of actions are available to these actors to hold government officials and bureaucrats accountable. These include, for example, citizen participation in public policy-making, participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, citizen monitoring of public service delivery, citizen advisory boards lobbying and advocacy campaigns.

Source; <http://inwebl8.worldbank.org/BSSD/sdvest.asf/66ByDocName/SocialAccoufflability>

## **GROUP DEVELOPMENT**

There are three easy ways these problem-solving meetings can be conducted, by:

- **Brainstorming**
- **Discussion group**
- **Working group**

Though these meetings may not be formally chaired, leadership is essential if they are to achieve the results you want.

### **BRAINSTORMING**

Brainstorming is quite different from the formal debate of business meetings. It is used to search for as many ideas as possible - quantity before quality.

#### *What it achieves*

Brainstorming is simply getting the greatest number of ideas from a group of people in a short time. It encourages everybody to contribute ideas uninhibited by formality.

Participants can put forward unusual proposals for initiatives or problem solving without the fear of ridicule or embarrassment.

Quite often, worthwhile ideas surface in such a relaxed forum where they would not in a more formal environment.

#### *How it works*

As many ideas as possible are recorded - NOT debated. Display the ideas put forward. Ideas that are not clear to the group should be clarified. Ask the group to do this, not just the person who put the idea forward.

#### *The leader's role*

Leaders must be enthusiastic about brainstorming and the positive results it may generate. They should be prepared to share enthusiasm, be able to generate noise, laughter and offbeat ideas, while not imposing their own views.

They must be able to write quickly and clearly as the ideas flow or alternatively a scribe may be appointed,

They should be uninhibited and accept and record all ideas.

They should be able to persuade the group to accept that any judgement of ideas will be deferred until after the brainstorming session is completed.

### **STEPS TO FOLLOW FOR SUCCESSFUL BRAINSTORMING:**

- 1 State the Topic
- 2 Outline the Rules
  - Concise statements are required (6-8 words)
  - No discussion or debate, apart from clarification of ideas
  - All ideas are written, so all members can see their contributions
  - Strict time limit is stated
- 3 Start
  - Facilitator invites members to put forward ideas
  - Don't push at the start
  - Encourage and praise contributors
  - Be aware of repetition
  - Don't allow debate at this stage.

#### 4 Stop

- Finish on "an upbeat"
- Don't drag it out

#### 5 Getting Consensus

There are many approaches, for example:

- Put the members into small groups and ask each group to select its four priorities. Then get a report from each group. Put aside the least favoured and vote on the top four.
- Vote by a show of hands and by this means put aside the least favoured.
- Allow each member four votes.

Each member then writes 4-3-2-1 against their top four priorities. In this way, you can identify the most favoured ideas.

#### 6 Summary

Clearly write up the group's final consensus in words they agree to.

If a specific action is proposed, identify a person to follow it up and when.

## **DISCUSSION GROUPS**

Discussion group meetings differ from formal business meetings in the way they are conducted and what they achieve,

They are in fact "ideas" meetings in which high levels of motivation are maintained. Special care must be taken to see that the problem, and not any individual, is tackled.

Formal debate is not used to reach decisions.

#### *What they achieve*

- Involvement by your members
- A sharing of ideas
- Identification of specific club or group issues
- A free flow of thoughts
- Members' pleasure in contributing
- Better understanding of club or group problems
- New approaches to club or group projects
- Enjoyment of a firm "closure"

#### *How they are run*

The meeting is structured so there is continual focus on the problem or problems you are there to solve.

It is important to:

- Identify specific problems
- Maintain a high level of motivation
- Ensure that the problem is tackled - not personalities.

Participants should emerge with a better understanding of issues within the organisation.

#### *The leader's role*

As in all meetings, the leader's role is crucial. He or she must pick a group with the skills and ability to work together to reach a solution.

The leader is a contributor and records and reports ideas.

An effective leader/coordinator must be able to move the group towards action.

Discussion groups will not be effective if you don't have the right leader.

## **WORKING GROUPS**

Working groups find solutions to problems and then set about implementing them.

Not as free-ranging as brainstorming sessions, nor as ideas-driven as discussion group meetings, they achieve measurable results,

Participants take an issue or problem, examine it, provide a written answer, which is discussed, voted on and then – if appropriate - acted upon.

### *What they achieve*

Working group sessions:

- Provide the opportunity to explore any issue fully and establish the mechanism to deal with it.
- Involve each and every member of the group in providing an answer, without pressure.
- Overcome the common hurdle of dominant, vocal group members inhibiting the contributions of others.
- Emerge with a firm action to be followed,

### *How they are run*

Up to nine people are chosen to form the working group - any more than this is unwieldy and often counter-productive,

The leader identifies the issue or problem in a single sentence on a whiteboard or butcher's paper.

Each member records his or her solution/s on notepaper. The working group reports in rotation and solutions are written on the board or butcher's paper.

Potential solutions are then discussed, put forward for preliminary vote, clarified with further discussion if necessary, voted on again and accepted as a point for necessary action.

### *The leader's role:*

- Plan the meeting
- Have the ability to involve all the participants
- Have the skill to draw discussion to a "closure"

He or she will structure the meeting so it can focus on key issues and engage in creative problem solving.

This resource is part of the Group/Club Development Scheme, which provides assistance to Western Australian sport and recreation clubs and organisations to become better managed, more sustainable and to provide good quality services to their members and participants.

Source: WA Government