

Decision Making

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The Decision-Making Process

Coalitions commonly need to decide which issues to prioritize, what activities to implement, which strategies to utilize in reaching out to the community, and the best ways to make use of limited resources. Coalitions that make effective decisions usually use a decision-making process. A group decision-making process typically involves the following steps:

1. Define the problem.
 - a. Divide large problems into subproblems as needed to allow for better understanding among group members.
2. Gather and share information on the problem.
3. Make a list possible solutions to the problem.
4. List the pros and cons of each potential solution.
5. Choose a solution to pursue.
6. Carry out strategies to solve the problem.
7. Evaluate the decision that was made.

Decision-Making Methods

The most common decision-making methods employed by coalitions are consensus and majority rule.

Consensus is the synthesis of ideas. A consensus is reached when all members mutually agree to a decision and feel like their views have been addressed. The consensus method of decision making takes longer than majority rule, but it contributes to group cohesion and can lead to higher levels of support for implementation of the decision (Butterfoss, 2007).

Majority rule is a process in which a group discusses a decision to be made and then takes a vote. While this method is quick and efficient, its major drawback is that the minority must go with the decision even if they are not supportive of it. This can create division and frustration, and members in the minority may not commit to the decision or wholeheartedly help to accomplish the task. Butterfoss suggests the following techniques to lessen frustration when utilizing majority rule:

- **Blind vote.** This technique is recommended when important or complex decisions need to be made. Blind vote may be as simple as a secret ballot that provides anonymity to the vote.
- **The 70/30 rule.** This rule requires at least 70 percent of the members to agree before a decision is made.
- **Levels of consensus.** This technique provides the facilitator with a way to gauge consensus, and it can be helpful when agreement does not seem imminent. In levels of consensus, the facilitator asks each group member to hold up one, two, three, four or five fingers reflecting his/her level of support for a specific decision. One finger indicates full support for the decision and five fingers indicate no support. The facilitator may then ask level four and level five individuals to share specific concerns.
 - » The levels of consensus technique can be paired with the 70/30 rule, where at least 70 percent of the members must be supportive of the decision before it is finalized.

In extreme cases, situations may arise when a decision must be made without adequate time to allow for group discussion. If a coalition leader is charged with single-handedly making a decision, he/she should try to contact at least a few of the group members for their input and ideas. A decision that is made by a single person on behalf of the group may or may not reflect the collective opinion of the coalition. This method of decision making may occasionally be appropriate for minor decisions, but it should be avoided as much as possible. Members are more likely to commit to and support decisions when they are part of the decision-making process.

References

Butterfoss, F.D. (2007). *Coalitions and Partnerships in Community Health*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



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Ohio Center for Action on Coalition Development (1992). *Building Coalitions: Coalition Formation and Maintenance*. Darby, PA: DIANE Publishing Company.

Raynor, J. (2011). *What Makes an Effective Coalition? Evidence-Based Indicators of Success*. The TCC Group. Retrieved from mcf.org/system/article_resources/0000/1297/What_Makes_an_Effective_Coalition.pdf.

Additional Resources

The Asset-Based Community Development Institute. "Downloadable Resources." Publications on community assessment and community mobilization. abcdinstitute.org/publications/downloadable

Coalitions Work. "Tools and Resources." Resources for a variety of coalition processes and coalition evaluation. coalitionswork.com/resources/tools

University of Kansas. "Community Tool Box." Toolkits on a variety of topics related to partnership building and community change. ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents

University of Wisconsin-Extension. "Program Development and Evaluation." Logic Model templates and examples. uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html

Iowa State University, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development. *Vision to Action: Take Charge Too*. Publication about community assessment, vision development, action planning and evaluation. soc.iastate.edu/extension/ncrcrd/ncrcrd-rrd182-print.pdf

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