

Coalition Building: Community-based Approach

“If you bring the right people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the community.”

~David Chrislip and Carl Larson

Reasons for taking a community-based approach:

- Concentrate the community’s focus on a particular problem (i.e., childhood obesity)
- Create alliances among those who might not normally work together
- Keep the community’s approach to issues consistent
- Empower elements of the community, or the community as a whole, to take control of its future
- Bring about more effective and efficient delivery of programs and eliminate any unnecessary duplication of effort
- Pool resources of organizations and individuals to accomplish a task that none of them could do alone
- Create long-term, permanent social change by allowing organizations and individuals to gain trust, share ideas, and move beyond preconceptions to the real issues underlying community needs. Cooperation among diverse groups and individuals can address many factors of influence (Figure 1) and lead to change in a community.

Figure 1. Factors Influencing Behavior Change



Collaborative Leader is critical in a community-based approach. An effective leader should be someone who can initiate discussions, identify problems or issues that need to be addressed, and promote collaboration. This person should also be able to:

- **Inspire commitment and action** by helping people develop the vision and passion to start and maintain the work that needs to be done.
- **Promote group problem solving** by helping people come to agreement and solve problems by modeling and teaching these skills.
- **Build broad-based involvement** by helping others contribute their ideas and experiences.
- **Sustain hope and participation** by helping the group set short-term goals and maintain the passion and commitment to keep going when long-term goals seem daunting.

An effective community-based approach will lead to a successful partnership that merges many various perspectives, knowledge, and skills. Steps to build this type of environment include:

- **Mobilizing the community.** The initial group of stakeholders should identify and engage additional members with the goal of gathering the right mix of people to get things done.
- **Developing trust.** An effective community-based approach requires that all stakeholders understand their roles, responsibilities, and rights. All stakeholders should be encouraged to be upfront about the resources and services they can provide, any foreseeable constraints and limitations, and their expectations and goals. Being honest at the beginning will help build positive relationships and synergy.
- **Creating Common Ground.** Although different organizations and individuals have varying goals and objectives, it is important to find common ground. Encourage all stakeholders to discuss their expectations and goals and work to find common ground. For example, a public health agency may want to increase physical activity in a community to improve the communities' health. An environmental group may want to reduce pollution. An intervention that increases the number of people who walk or ride bicycles for transportation supports both groups' goals.
- **Communicating Effectively and Using Appropriate Language.** Stakeholders should agree, from the beginning, how they will communicate (both formally and informally) to ensure that information is shared effectively. Remember that some people may not be familiar with the language of certain disciplines. Identify the level of knowledge and understanding of stakeholders early on.