



New County Extension Directors Fact Sheet
Building Effective Partnerships and Coalitions

Building partnerships for positive change

Building partnerships based on synergy, or the idea that by working as a group, individuals can accomplish more than they could alone. WSU Extension Educators have chosen to be a part of real and positive community change.

Working with partners presents significant difficulties. Many groups are afraid of losing identity, or that one group will get more “credit.” Resources often get closely tied to new dollars instead of looking at the use and distribution of resources as a whole. The time commitment needed to build new relationships is often blamed for not building coalitions. Lack of understanding of potential partners has also been used as a roadblock. Each partner brings something unique to a partnership. These differences, however uncomfortable, together with a renewed commitment to impact the lives of people, can lead to lasting success. For success, each partner must bring...

A Collaborative Framework put together by the National Network for Collaboration can help address many of these barriers. In addition, by examining the situational factors and structural dimensions of coalitions, three predictors have been identified that can predict effectiveness of collaborative relationships. Consensus on purpose and roles of the partnerships, formalization of agreements and sharing of resources can each have a significant impact on how effectively a coalition functions.

Tools for Building Coalitions

Establishing a consensus on the needs of the community, the goals of the project, the roles of the members, and the methods to be used had the greatest impact on collaborative effectiveness. Formalization of agreements through memorandums of understanding (MOU), utilizing agendas and minutes at meetings, and defining and recording specific responsibilities and expectations help reinforce the communications of the partners. Research also indicated that as partners invested more of their resources such as money, time, referrals, visibility, equipment, information, and other programs they perceived increases in collaborative effectiveness.

These predictors used with a framework that is built on being grounded in an appreciation of diversity among members can lead to successful relationships. By building a core foundation that continually articulates the mission and vision of the coalition, members remain focused on the issue at hand. Process and contextual factors, or situational factors and structural dimensions help coalition builders understand the puzzle pieces that often impact their efforts. Focusing on real outcomes that make measurable impact on peoples’ lives allows the coalition and its members to communicate to the public whether they are making positive changes in their community.

Decision-makers and funding bodies are demanding more and more accountability from the organizations they fund. At the same time they are requiring more cooperation among organizations who they perceive as having the potential to impact the issues in question. This requires WSU Extension Educators to focus on building relationships with new and very different partners, often with organizations who compete with them for limited federal and state resources. Traditionally, Extension has collaborated with organizations to address a myriad of issues.

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