

Building a Coalition to Prevent Suicide

Questions To Ask When You Are Thinking About Building A Coalition:

- What would the unifying issue(s) be?
- What resources could come from different organizations?
- What obstacles might be encountered?

How To Form A Community Coalition For Suicide Prevention:

1. Develop an initial description of a possible coalition that makes sense.
2. Make a list of all the groups that might be part of the coalition.
3. Talk in person to representatives of each group. See what they think of the basic idea of the coalition. Revise the basic description modifying it so it takes other groups concerns into account.
4. If members of the group have been attending and supporting the events of other groups in the potential coalition, it will help with recruiting.
5. Call an initial meeting inviting representatives of groups to attend. It will help to have leaders of the key groups sign the inviting letter. Think of the diversity of those signing the letter. Some groups have different political perspectives and getting those represented by those doing the inviting would be important.
6. At the first meeting, it's good to have several facilitators (representing the diversity of your coalition). Make sure everyone has a chance to express his or her ideas. Work to settle on a goal(s) for the coalition that everyone supports. Pick a goal that can be accomplished. Work to get everyone to agree the coalition will work on the items members agree on and disagreements will be set aside.
7. Try to get groups to send the same representative to future meetings for consistency.
8. As work proceeds, divide up tasks. Take advantage of the strengths of different member organizations. Ask every member organization to do something to help the effort. It is important to have them as active members, not just names on a list.

Guidelines For Successful Coalition Building:

1. **They are formed to meet a specific need.** The most effective coalitions come together around a common issue. Make sure the development of group goals is a joint process, rather than one or two group representatives deciding the goals and then inviting others to join.
2. **Understand and respect each group's self-interest.** There must be a balance between the goals and needs of the coalition and of the individual organizations.
3. **Respect each group's internal process.** It is important to understand and respect the differences among the groups. These differences are often apparent in processes or chains of command for decision-making. Make a commitment to learning about the unique values, history, interests, structure and agenda of the other groups and organizations.
4. **Agree to disagree.**
5. **Structure decision making carefully.**
6. **Distribute credit fairly.** Recognize that contributions will vary. Appreciate different contributions. Each organization will have something different to offer. Each one is important so be sure to acknowledge them all whether they be volunteers, meeting space, funding, copying, publicity, leafleting, passing resolutions, or other resources.
7. **Give and Take.** It is important to build on existing relationships and connections with other organizations. Don't just ask or expect support; be prepared to give it.
8. **Develop a common strategy.** The strength of a coalition is in its unity. Work together with other organizations to develop a strategy that makes sense to everyone. The tactics you choose should be the ones that all the organizations can endorse. If not, the tactics should be taken by individual organizations independent of the coalition.
9. **Be strategic.** Building coalitions requires a good strategy of deciding what organizations to ask and who will be the one to invite those people to the table.
10. **To ensure consistency, send the same representative to each coalition meeting.** This helps meetings run more smoothly. These individuals should also be decision-making members of the organizations that they represent.
11. **Formalize your coalition.** It is best to make explicit agreements. Make sure everyone understands what their responsibilities and rights area. Being clear can prevent conflicts.