

Effectively Convening Your Coalition

Coalition Building Tips Sheet

*Content from Grassroots Solutions Coalition Building Virtual Summit
Hosted for the WI Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, February 23, 2012*

Questions Raised:

- To convene or not to convene?
- Does convening partners/members help you build a stronger coalition?
 - Are there ways to make these meetings more productive?

Discussion and Challenges:

Coordinators are having difficulty with engaging individuals and coalition members if there isn't a specific task or request.

- Once they have become involved in an action, individuals experience a sense of contribution and will be more likely to engage again.

Remember: It's important to keep members engaged at some level all the time.

- Keep in mind that individuals don't have to come to every coalition meeting to be engaged.
- Some coalitions have different levels of engagement:
 - Executive committees meeting monthly to discuss work plan progress and strategies to complete activities and work flow.
 - Coalition meetings quarterly to bring individuals in through one or more issues, provide updates, and engage membership.

Coordinators should make the decision to convene meetings based on the purpose.

- Don't convene meetings unless there is something to be accomplished.
- Don't need to connect in-person, can do so using conference calls and technology.

One Wisconsin coalition's evolution:

Before the coalition held regular in-person coalition meetings (approximately 2 hours each) and formed leadership committees and sub-committees.

Currently the coalition does not conduct in-person meetings to accommodate member interest and schedules. The coalition connects regularly through conference calls (bi-monthly or as needed) with 15 to 25 participants held during the noon hour. The participants include health officers, public health staff, parents, community members, 18-24 year olds, senior citizens and more. The calls address coalition business issues and updates.

Members also participate in subcommittees and areas of interest using web conferencing.

Lesson Learned: It is more important to make connections than to hold meetings.

Connections are also held open through technology like Facebook page, texting, and Twitter. For new members, individual meetings are conducted to share the work plan, assesses interest, provide orientation and provide opportunities for active involvement.

Other Tips for Effectively Convening Your Coalition:

Before Meetings Begin

- Host working meetings only when needed and let your supporters know you will only call on them when you need their help.
- Consider convening fewer meetings for longer time periods, make them working meetings, for example, quarterly for 2-3 hours in different locations.
- Host issue-based meetings and target audiences you hope to attract with specific meeting topics.
- Rotate locations around your region and offer folks to join by phone or web.
- Hold meetings at a time and place that is convenient and comfortable for those attending.
- Do some local outreach before the meeting occurs.
- Partner with other local groups to increase the potential for increased attendance.
- Identify people with the skills and talents that the coalition needs to achieve its goals.
- Don't just recruit people who agree with you. Good work often gets done when a broad range of personalities and skills are at the table.
- Make personal outreach to targeted individuals via phone or personal email with specific ask to join meeting.

During Meeting

- Make the meeting as effective as possible. Do your homework beforehand.
- Have an agenda and be clear about what information you want to convey and what outcomes you want to achieve.
- Involve strong facilitators and community leaders to help ensure discussions are rewarding.
- Use language, exercises, games, and visuals that will connect with meeting participants.
- Provide food, transportation assistance, childcare or other incentives to increase attendance.
- Allow time and space for participants to talk with one another and build relationships.
- Be enthusiastic!