

Forming Community Coalitions That Work by Michael A. Sand, Sand Associates

In a different context, Benjamin Franklin stated, “We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.”

In these troubled times for nonprofits, it is time for us to “hang together.”

The first step is just to think through carefully the organizations with whom you want to cooperate. Perhaps this could be the sole topic of a board retreat, a staff meeting, or an ad hoc committee formed for this purpose.

- Organizations providing the same types of service, e.g., AIDS organizations in the same community
- Organizations provide different services to the same individuals e.g., several agencies serving the same low-income community.
- Public-private partnerships e.g. schools and businesses providing training services to the same individuals
- Organizations with similar legislative objectives
- Different types of groups serving the same community e.g. churches, schools, law enforcement agencies

Once you have identified possible partners, discuss the possible avenues of cooperation.

- Agencies pooling resources to help the same clients
- Forming coalitions for specific purposes, e.g., planning joint legislative strategies
- Joining together to increase resources ,e.g., planning major joint fundraising efforts
- Joining together to decrease expenditures e.g., joint purchasing, joint training

Then begin to meet with other organizations to see if there is interest in any of the areas you have identified. It will be more effective in the long run to initially meet with groups one by one. Only when it appears that several groups will cooperate that it is time to invite additional groups to a meeting.

After each meeting, decide when the next one will be held. Make sure someone takes notes as to what agreements were reached and distribute these notes to the group.

Decide on a simple project before attempting a more complicated one. Even with a simple project, put in writing who exactly will perform each task by when.

Have all agreements in writing and approved by all participating boards of directors.

If there are disagreements, resolve them in private. Meet personally with individuals creating problems. E-mail is not a good communications tool for problem-solving.

(For additional information, read Chapter 9 of *How to Manage an Effective Nonprofit Organization*, Career Press 2005).

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