

Ten Positive Preparatory Steps to Enable a Population Health Coalition to Prosper

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Ten Positive Preparatory Steps to Enable a Population Health Coalition to Prosper

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Engaging the community to tackle a challenging community health issue (e.g., diabetes, obesity, tobacco, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, mental health) necessitates a coalition of community members in order to make a measurable collective impact on health status. These community population health coalitions do not just “happen” – rather they are the result of an individual or organization emerging to take the leadership role of the coalition. This may be someone who emerges as the Community Chief Health Strategist (CCHS)⁵. The CCHS may be a leader from public health, healthcare, community organizations, faith groups, or other service organizations. Above all the operative word is *leader*.

Our experience has informed us that these coalitions are fragile and without proper leadership, nurturing, and follow through, they can quickly disintegrate. The suggested ten steps detailed below will help the CCHS facilitate a successful coalition with positive impact on a community population health issue.

Step 1: Preparation – Proper planning prior to events is a major duty of the CCHS. This is initiated by arranging the venue, inviting the right participants, involving any high profile community guests to give support, and engaging the right internal staff members.

Step 2: Price – As expenses can be prohibitive, the CCHS needs to cost out what this coalition will need for funding before launching (i.e., space, supplies, staffing). The CCHS can look for in-kind contributions from coalition members or grant funding to help provide meeting space or use of clerical staff. It is best to have the funding issues out of the way prior to starting.

Step 3: Process – The CCHS develops a process to involve and engage community members in the exploration of the population health issue. A process is needed that will help the coalition to prioritize and identify which community health issue to focus on. A population health driver diagram⁶ is one framework that can be used successfully, or alternatively, a relatively straightforward quality

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⁵ Public Health Leadership Forum, *The High Achieving Governmental Health Department in 2020 as the Community Chief Health Strategist*, RESOLVE, May 2014.

⁶ http://www.phf.org/resourcestools/Pages/Developing_a_Population_Health_Driver_Diagram.aspx, accessed February 8, 2016

improvement project approach might be deployed. The process selected will depend on the breadth and depth of the community population health issue.

Step 4: Plan – This is the what’s and how’s of operating the coalition – meeting times, roles and responsibilities, expectations, improvement targets, process to be used, etc.

Step 5: People – It is difficult at times to foster collaboration between multiple community stakeholders. Coalitions need dedicated people (internal staff and external partners) who will participate fully, be on time for meetings, complete assignments between meetings, and share resources. The CCHS needs to coach the team and emphasize a team oriented environment to help guide and grow the coalition. This team environment is necessary to help discuss strategies and solutions in a positive way. The biggest challenge a CCHS will face is getting people involved and keeping them involved.

Step 6: Participation – Even with the right people, keeping them actively engaged can be challenging. They must agree to be full and active participants in the process. If they do not fully participate and attend all meetings, you will find that the coalition is always catching people up and progress will be slow. However, competing priorities and other responsibilities can hinder full participation even among the most committed. Meetings must be run effectively and efficiently with clear assignments and on a set time frame. By doing so you recognize that time is one of the most valuable resources your community stakeholders have to give. It is important that members have a sense of accomplishment at the end of the meeting in order to feel that it was a productive use of their time.

Step 7: Product – It is important for the coalition to define the customers for the actions and interventions. This will help the coalition understand what the final output will look like and the content of the final deliverable product.

Step 8: Place – When holding the coalition meeting, have plenty of meeting space so everyone is comfortable, have areas for breakouts that give privacy for sensitive discussions, and have plenty of supplies, flip charts, and wall space to post them.

Step 9: Promotion – The messaging part of the process defines how the communications between meetings, to the general public, and to the community are designed and delivered. Some coalitions have a shared website where meeting minutes, research articles, comments, and suggestions can be shared among coalition team members.

Step 10: Praise – It is always important to recognize each individual and the organizations they represent in all material that is distributed internally and externally. People want to be recognized for their contributions and it makes them feel like they are appreciated for the effort they put forth.

In our experience, practicing these ten steps will help ensure that a coalition performs successfully and prospers.