

Building Coalitions: Networking¹

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Introduction

Building Coalitions is a series of publications that provide information on the needs, preparations, skills, and work required for community and other groups to establish and sustain coalitions for collaboration on common causes. This publication is one of the fifteen-part series of fact sheets compiled by The Ohio Center for Action on Coalitions. It has been adapted for County Extension Faculty in Florida to facilitate collaboration with local and regional organizations and groups, such as nonprofits, cooperatives, county Extension associations, and others that may benefit from a plan for working together to achieve mutual goals.

Networks and coalitions are critical in today's world of constant change, and to create this, individuals need to know where to go, whom to contact, and how to obtain information and resources to achieve a specific goal.

Networks

A network consists of individuals or organizations who share information, ideas, resources or goals to accomplish individual or group goals (Jackson 1991). Networking is a process of acquiring resources and building power by using or creating linkages between two or more individuals, groups, or organizations. It provides a valuable tool for getting things done (Wells 1989).

Getting Started

We network every day of our lives, whether it's informal or formal. If one individual lacks the information you are seeking, he or she can refer you to another individual. The more individuals you know, the more individuals will know you, and the greater the probability of accomplishing your goals. Your visibility increases and your network of individuals increases. So the aim is to meet as many individuals as possible.

As you network with individuals, you will need some basic tools, such as (1) an address book or Rolodex (paper or digital) to record and keep track of contacts' addresses, notes of meetings, commitments, and any detailed information; (2) an appointment calendar to set up meetings; (3) business cards that contain your contact information.

Using and Expanding Networks

First, decide whether your current goal is money, power, or social. Examine your list and contact the most powerful and influential individual to help achieve your goal. During your networking, discuss what you have in common, your skills, the type of information you are seeking and available resources. The more you share ideas, the more you will increase your potential clout.

Another aspect of networking is involvement in professional associations that can provide a wide range of contacts. Attend as many association meetings and conferences as possible. Make yourself visible and establish a reputation. Circulate at the meetings and exchange business cards; talk to everyone you know and meet new contacts. Afterwards, follow up with a phone call or note. Also participate in organizations other than professional associations where you can develop a wide range of contacts with people who share your ideas and concerns. Remember, it's a two-way street.

You may want to establish a formal network with a specific interest or field. This can provide opportunities to meet individuals with a broad range of experiences and expertise, obtain current information, meet specialists in the field and develop friendships.

Summary

We can have a greater impact on our goals by using networks and coalitions as major tools to multiply our power and efforts. If you network with ten individuals, and those ten network with ten more, you have increased the number of individuals with whom you can exchange information and resources from ten to one hundred. We can do a great deal when we join efforts with those of other individuals.

Acknowledgment

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