



Step by Step Guide to Building a Local Coalition

Getting Started

1) Identify an organization to lead the charge that is:

- Well-respected and credible in the community,
- Willing to leave the agency ego at the door – give up some credit and control,
- Willing to experiment
- Sees responding to the crisis as part of their mission but realized they can't do it alone.
- Committed to making the development of the coalition a major organizational priority
- Committed to the coalition's success from the top down – CEO & Board
- Equipped with the resources to launch the effort

2) Make leading this effort someone's sole focus!

- Can't be delegated to someone who is handling ten other things since building the coalition already means juggling multiple stakeholders, issues, etc.
- Best led from outside the organization that is launching it to establish objectivity and neutrality from the beginning.
- Temporary contractual relationship best

3) Determine the geographic & programmatic scope of the effort. Will it include:

- Prevention/Intervention?
- Neighborhood stabilization?
- Community Reinvestment ?
- Public Policy?
- All of the above?

4) Determine the desired "End Game" ? Do you want the coalition and its work to . . .

- Evolve into a new nonprofit organization with a broader but related mission,
- Be integrated into the partner network,
- Be integrated into the founding agency as a program, initiative, etc., or
- Dissolve as the crisis wanes.

5) Hire the Right Person to Lead. Ideally, look for someone who:

- Can serve as the public face of the effort,
- Is well-respected with a network of relationships in the community,
- Has a track-record of successfully bringing people together – but not necessarily up to speed on the foreclosure crisis.
- Has the right attitude and will leave personal ego at the door,
- Can listen well,
- Can *Connect the Dots*,
- Can relate to and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders,
- Is passionate about the crisis,
- Is energetic and entrepreneurial,
- Can motivate and focus diverse groups on achieving common goals, and
- Demonstrates creativity!

- 6) **Do Your Homework** – Before meeting with stakeholders, The coalition lead must get and stay up to speed with the national, state and local picture of the crisis:
- Gather the Local Data – sheriff sales, tax foreclosures, unemployment, etc.
 - Assess current local efforts – Where are your HUD and MSHDA certified agencies, counselors and legal services attorneys?
 - Seek out websites, major publications and blogs to stay on top of what's going on.
 - Connect with the Michigan Foreclosure Task Force and Michigan Foreclosure Prevention Project.

A Basic Roadmap

- 1) **Convene the front-line service providers** – the local HUD and/or MSHDA-certified foreclosure counselors and legal service attorneys - to develop positive working relationships, better coordinate their efforts and to get their insights into the crisis as it affects homeowners.
- 2) **Develop Basic Information Pieces** (Keep it simple & cheap)
 - Develop a logo to establish identity and neutrality, independence from founding agency.
 - One-pager describing the purpose of the coalition (PDF)
 - One-pager on the crisis with local stats (PDF)
 - Stakeholder Questionnaire (PDF)
 - Supporting Partner Letter (PDF)
 - Consider a simple website or a page on the founding agency's site.
- 3) **Identify & Meet with Stakeholders:**
 - Some obvious stakeholders include:
 - County Treasurers
 - County Registers of Deeds
 - Real Estate Associations
 - Bankruptcy Attorneys
 - Human Services Providers
 - Local Community Foundations
 - Hospitals/health care systems
 - United Way
 - Local Banks, Credit Unions & Title Companies
 - Libraries
 - Media
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Community Colleges
 - Major Employers of all kinds
 - Schools
 - Local Units of Government
 - There is no substitute for one-on-one meetings so shoot for this.
 - Develop & use a set of stakeholders questions to structure meetings
Email background documents & questions in advance.
 - Take no more than an hour.
 - Listen well
 - Write meeting summaries
 - Send thank-you emails & notes
 - Ask for initial Endorsement Letter
 - Build Supporting Partner list/database

- 4) **Convene & Communicate but don't waste people's time!**
 - IMPORTANT: Meet only when there is a reason!
 - Bring the Key Resource/service providers (foreclosure counselors, legal service attorneys, etc.) together first.
 - Expand to those involved in the tax & mortgage foreclosure process (county treasurers, registers of deeds, sheriff's deputies, etc.)
 - Eventually widen the circle to other key stakeholders/potential Supporting Partners.
 - Use an e-newsletter to keep everyone on the same page (PDF)
 - Don't rush to put together a structure before there is meaningful work for everyone. The structure should evolve.

- 5) **Reach out to the Community**
 - Town Hall Meetings
 - Meetings with employees of large businesses
 - Summits
 - Presentations to gatherings related to each stakeholder group, i.e. Boards of Realtors, Human Service Groups, City, County ,economic developers, etc.

- 6) **Establish Priorities & Goals:**
 - Be patient
 - These must come from the info & insight you gather as you build the coalition
 - Allow a few months' time before bringing interested parties together in some type of Summit-like event designed to establish priorities
 - Depending upon the geographic scope, these can vary from community to community within a county or county to county within a region.

- 7) **Let Priorities Drive the Structure**
 - Avoid setting up an arbitrary "organizational" structure before you're ready and have identified the priorities & work to be done.
 - Simple Steering Committee representing stakeholders, priorities and geographic scope can work well. Keep meetings to a minimum.
 - Time-limited task forces focused on a single priority in a given geographic area works well.

- 8) **Push forward, keeping everyone in the loop, sharing successes and challenges.**
 - The paid coalition director must constantly connect the dots, keep everyone up to speed and moving in the same direction.
 - Monthly E-Newsletters to all interested parties with infrequent Steering Committee Meetings and more frequent task force meetings is a workable model.

- 9) **Plan for "End Game"**
 - Make no mistake,
 - The money will go away & the contracted person leading the effort will also go away.
 - Involve Steering Committee and Founding Partner Agency in planning

- 10) **Continue to mine the partner network to help address future challenges.**
 - If successful, a coalition will result in a new web of working relationships that can be called upon when new challenges arise.
 - Don't miss the opportunity to keep this network alive.