

Factors that Contribute to Successful Councils

From Research to Practice

Factors related to Mission and Goals:

- The council has a clear vision and mission.
- The council has clear goals and concrete, attainable objectives.
- The council has a commitment to science-based practices.
- The council does not offer direct services.

Factors related to the Environment:

- The community has a history of collaboration or cooperation.
- The community has a favorable political and/or social climate.

Factors related to Process or Structure:

- Members share a stake in both processes and outcomes.
- The council permits decision making at many tiers.
- The council has clear roles and policy guidelines.
- The council is adaptable.
- The council has an established identity as a (501(c)(3) organization.
- The council has staff and offices.

Factors related to Characteristics of the Board of Directors:

- Directors exhibit mutual respect, understanding, and trust.
- The membership of the board is diverse.
- The board has no designated seats.
- Members see collaboration as being in their and the council's interest.
- Members are able to compromise.
- Members represent themselves, not the agency for which they work.
- Board members hold power in the community.

Factors related to Communication:

- The council establishes open and frequent communication with media and colleagues.
- The council establishes informal and formal communications links.
- The council is represented by a skilled communicator.
- The council develops newsletters and media campaigns and holds meetings and conferences.

Factors related to Resources:

- The council is supported by diversified funding streams.
- The council has stable funding.

Creating and Fostering A Local Council

From Research to Practice

Find a Catalyst:

Establishing a strong council takes a visionary and committed individual who is willing to motivate and lead the council for a year or longer. Although a lead service agencies may be gin this process, if the council is to survive long term, you must seek volunteer leaders from across the breadth of the community. If leadership remains within a particular agency, the community may continue to see teenage pregnancy as a problem for that agency, such as the health department or the school, to address.

Gather Supportive People on a Planning Committee:

The leader must assemble a small planning committee of six to 10 people (not just service providers) to begin the work of organizing to promote community-wide teen pregnancy prevention. Since prevention is a long-term goal, the planning committee must think and plan for the distant future. The planning committee should continue to act until the council's board of directors, board officers, bylaws, and mission statement are in place.

Create a Mission Statement:

The mission statement represents the philosophical framework of the organization. This mission statement will send a clear message to the community, to funding sources, and to policy makers that the council stands for science-based efforts to prevent teen pregnancy. The mission statement will guide the development of council's strategic plan—its long-term goals, objectives. The mission statement will also guide the selection of board members. Board members must commit to supporting the mission of the council as put forth in the mission statement.

Select Representative Board Members:

Members of the first board should be diverse, representing different constituencies, and should number no more than 20 individuals. Most nonprofit organizations begin with a self-selected board of directors, but the planning committee should make every effort to recruit a diverse and committed board for the council.

To recruit a supportive board, avoid publicly choosing the board members. A public meeting to select board members may undercut the council by giving opportunity for board membership to individuals who oppose the council and its mission. Some people who want to be involved in the council will support *only* those programs that have a narrow and limited focus, such as abstinence-only-until-marriage. Unfortunately, experience shows that people and organizations that do not support *multiple, comprehensive* prevention strategies will be divisive, create dissension, and impede action. They may even seek to take over the council or to sabotage its efforts.

Identify Board Officers:

Meeting in closed session, the planning committee should draw up a slate of suggested board officers to present to the new board at its first meeting. To have a strong and effective board of directors, its officers should be those whose commitment to science-based teen pregnancy prevention strategies is certain.

Clarify the Role of the Board:

The board of directors is the council's decision making body. Only members of the board have a vote in its decisions. Anyone else attending public meetings or activities does not have a vote. The board operates the council until staff is hired and continues to develop the policies that drive staff's work. Keep public meetings separate from meetings of the board of directors.

Develop Bylaws:

The planning committee should also meet privately to develop the council's bylaws. Operating from the outset with bylaws can help the council to avoid problems and unfair actions. At the first board meeting, members of the board of directors should adopt bylaws, either as proposed by the planning committee or as amended by the board.

Establish Legal Status as a Nonprofit:

The council may wish to collect contributions. To do so, it will have to establish its status as a nonprofit, tax exempt, 501(c)3 organization. A nonprofit also needs to register as an organization within its state and local jurisdiction. Foundations, government bodies, and community funding sources usually contribute financially *only* to organizations that have IRS and registered nonprofit status and that are formally organized within the law.

Schedule Consistent Meetings at a Neutral Site:

Once the board, its officers, and the bylaws are in place, the board can schedule regular meetings, preferably in a consistent and neutral site, such as a library or a business' meeting room. When the council has an office, it may be the best place to meet. Avoid meeting at a service provider's space, as this could be interpreted as 'owning' the council.

Form a Program Planning Committee:

First, the board of directors should form a program planning committee. When each meeting is partly dedicated to the business of the council and partly to education and information sharing, board members *will* attend. A speaker, video, panel discussion, or educational program will keep board members involved and interested. The program planning committee should act quickly to brainstorm projects for the council during the first year. Focusing on awareness and education can lay the foundation for bigger and better strategies in the future and will gain the council credibility within the community, while allowing time to plan and implement more expansive strategies.

Develop a Network of Supporters:

The council's 'members' are only those on the board of directors. Community councils often encourage 'friends,' or volunteers to contribute time, money, and support; but the board of directors constitutes the council's voting membership and determines the direction of the council's work.

Assess Community Assets and Needs:

The first large project should be an assessment of the community's existing services, need, and resources. The assessment can also gather different views about the direction of the council's work.

Hold a Community Forum:

Often, as part of the needs assessment process, a council holds a forum. It is not about voting or making final decisions, but instead educates, builds interest, and mobilizes the community. The forum is a way to solicit ideas. Nevertheless, the board of directors ultimately determines the policies, programs, and practices of the council.



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Maintaining an Agency-Based Coalition

In many communities, an agency-based coalition spearheads teen pregnancy prevention efforts. Housing a coalition within a lead agency has both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages may include the lead agency's ability to provide financial, administrative, structural, and spatial support to the new coalition. Disadvantages may include: 1) disaffection and dissent among other members of the coalition, if they perceive the lead agency as 'owning' the coalition; and 2) the gradual disappearance of the coalition as its work is absorbed by the agency. Maintaining an agency-based coalition takes hard work. Yet the results are usually worth the effort. The following tips can help.

- Obtain authority from member organizations for representatives to participate in the coalition as agents of their organization. Too often, members of the coalition lack authority to act on behalf of their respective organizations.
- Encourage each member organization to clarify its commitment to the coalition. Each organizational member needs to be a "responsible partner," including: 1) clarifying how its mission and goals fit with those of the coalition; 2) clarifying expectations of the coalition; 3) identifying how it will benefit from participation; 4) committing to the time required for coalition work; 5) acknowledging other members of the coalition, their commitments, and their capabilities; 6) being willing to modify its policies and procedures to facilitate the coalition's work; and 7) committing explicitly to what the coalition can expect from it.
- Secure letters of commitment. A letter of commitment from each participating agency formalizes the relationship between each member organization and the coalition, including: 1) the organization's commitment to the mission, objectives, and strategies of the coalition; 2) what the organization expects in return for its participation; 3) how much time the organization's representative may commit to the coalition and recognition that this commitment is part of the representative's job; 4) whether the representative can make commitments on behalf of the organization; and 5) other actions, responsibilities, or roles that the member organization will provide.
- Establish roles. Delineate coalition members' roles. In addition to having a steering committee and a coordinator, many coalitions develop special task forces or subcommittees to carry out their actual work. For example, subcommittees might include those on media, public relations, membership, resources, direct services, or public affairs. Each subcommittee should be represented by at least one member of the steering committee. Subcommittees should have goals, objectives, and specific tasks. The steering committee should periodically revisit whether a subcommittee is needed, whether its goals and benchmarks are appropriate, and what it has accomplished.

The Roles of a Local Council

A local council can play many roles in the community as it seeks to promote science-based practices. This handout provides selected examples.

Advocate: The council advocates for, supports, and encourages programs and strategies that positively affect adolescent sexual behavior, pregnancy, and parenting. The council:

- Advocates for teens' appointment to boards of youth-serving agencies;
- Sponsors media campaigns;
- Supports school-based health care;
- Promotes day care programs for children of teen parents; and
- Seeks funding to create comprehensive programs for pregnant and parenting students.

Catalyst: The council plans, implements, and evaluates pilot programs and, if effective, turns them over to established service providers. The council:

- Actively involves teens in establishing priorities and strategies;
- Creates hotlines for teens;
- Sponsors school health fairs in junior and senior high schools;
- Establishes peer educator training programs; and
- Holds parent/child communication workshops for parents.

Facilitator: The council serves as a resource and referral center for the community. The council:

- Develops and distributes pocket-sized cards, informing teens of community services;
- Publishes a local resource directory;
- Develops a library of resources for the community; and
- Organizes a conference to share long-range plans with youth-serving professionals.

Coordinator: The council facilitates and assists providers in prevention efforts. The council:

- Coordinates quarterly, agency-to-agency roundtables;
- Serves as an advisor for local family life education groups;
- Coordinates seminars on adolescent health for area health agencies; and
- Coordinates *Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month* in May *Let's Talk Month* in October.

Educator: The council provides information concerning adolescent sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting to the community. The council:

- Collects and shares statistics on adolescent reproductive and sexual health;
- Compiles cost study data on adolescent pregnancy;
- Organizes an annual meeting;

- Prints a quarterly newsletter, offering information regarding adolescent pregnancy prevention to ministers, women's and men's clubs, university or college student organizations, medical societies, health care providers, county commissions, city councils, school boards, PTAs, and junior and senior high schools;
- Holds briefings for radio and TV executives and editors of community newspapers;
- Develops public service announcements (PSAs) featuring local teens; and
- Submits articles and editorials to newspapers.

Researcher: The council serves as a researcher and evaluator in the community. The council:

- Conducts needs and assets assessments;
- Collects annual data on community teens' sexual behavior;
- Collects available community data by zip code;
- Evaluates programs; and
- Publishes the data it collects.

Typical Sources of Conflict and Suggested Solutions for Effective Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalitions

From Research to Practice

Source of Conflict: Diverse Philosophical Positions within the Coalition

- Conflicting attitudes about appropriate sexual behavior for teens.
- Conflicting beliefs about strategies for prevention, including sex education and contraceptive and condom availability.
- Attitudes conflict regarding abortion.

Suggested Solutions: Address Philosophical Differences

- Determine at the outset how the coalition will deal with conflicts. Draw up a list of *effective* prevention programs and strategies that may be useful in the community.
- Agree that stakeholders do not have to agree on all components.
- Choose coalition members carefully to ensure that core philosophies in regard to adolescent sexual health are similar *and* representative of the community.
- Ask members to commit clearly to the coalition's mission, goals, and objectives.
- Focus on the public health issues involved in teen pregnancy.
- Educate members of the coalition about previous research and evaluation on teen pregnancy prevention strategies. Develop strategies consistent with the research.
- Assess community perceptions about teen pregnancy and implement strategies that are consistent with community norms and beliefs.
- Develop community-wide standards of care, outlining minimum levels of service provision that are necessary, regardless of philosophical differences.
- Focus on areas of shared belief rather than on differences. Decided which projects can be undertaken by the coalition and which projects are better left to member organizations.

Source of Conflict: Vocal Opposition from Outside the Coalition

- Strong opposition arises to derail coalition efforts.
- Community members voice concerns and reservations.

Suggested Solutions: Assess the Social and Political Climate, Listen and Talk

- Hold community forums to address misinformation and to hear and respond to concerns.
- Write letters to the editor and appear at PTA, community, and faith-based meetings and on local television and radio shows. Listen, explain, and respond.
- Assess community perceptions about teen pregnancy and implement strategies that are consistent with community norms and beliefs.

Source of Conflict: Lack of Knowledge about What Works

- Frequent debates occur over whether research has been conducted to validate some approaches and whether these approaches should be attempted.
- Misinformation circulates and people feel confused about what works.

Suggested Solutions: Utilize Existing Research

- Conduct research to identify successful approaches used in other communities. Focus on what is known to work. Then, get the word out about what works.
- Educate members of the coalition and the community about previous research and evaluation on teen pregnancy prevention strategies. Develop strategies consistent with the research.

- Combine research conducted in other fields, such as violence prevention, with teen pregnancy prevention research to create hybrid models. Keep the community informed about what works.
- Determine the appropriate timing for programs. Set short and long-term goals to test various approaches.

Source of Conflict: Power Struggles within the Coalition

- Conflict arises about who should belong to the coalition.
- Conflict arises about who should lead the coalition.
- Conflict arises about who should lead various efforts of the coalition.
- Some coalition members feel they perform all the work and get none of the credit.

Suggested Solutions: Address Power Imbalances and Power Needs

- Look for underlying issues, such as a history of conflict, members' fearing loss of control or autonomy, and members' separate needs for funding.
- Work to ensure that decision making is shared and that a few members are not making all the decisions.
- Take time to review the customs of the members, define frequently used terminology, acknowledge different decision-making and communication styles, and decide which will be used.
- Acknowledge the work and contributions of every member of the coalition.

Source of Conflict: Low Levels of Trust

- Self-interests of various coalition members are hidden.
- Self-interests of various coalition members are not being met.
- Communication between coalition members is poor.
- Past history has left some members wary of working with other members.

Suggested Solutions: Evaluate Membership and Work to Improve Trust

- Determine who should be a member and whether members can accept the need to find common ground.
- Review the selection criteria for membership. Ask people to choose replacements, as necessary, to ensure the presence of attributes needed by the coalition.
- Rotate leaders.
- Acknowledge conflicts of interest.
- Look at past collaborations, acknowledge where they went wrong, and determine a different course that will avoid past errors.

Source of Conflict: Poor Communication and Lack of Clear Authority within the Coalition

- Meeting convener lacks needed communication skills.
- Meetings are ineffective or boring and accomplish little.
- People attend infrequently, or organizational representatives change, requiring frequent need to bring people up-to-date.
- Individuals face demands that they work for the coalition and simultaneously fulfill all job-related duties and responsibilities for their own organizations.

Suggested Solutions: Identify Needed Skill and Characteristics; Address Issues of Responsibilities

- Choose a skilled convener.
- Ask coalition members to share, or rotate, responsibility for leading meetings.
- Practice communication skills and review how member organizations manage communication.
- Ask those in authority in member organizations to commit to consistent representation, and, when necessary, to reduce workload for staff with coalition assignments.
- Establish clear, manageable benchmarks and outcomes to measure the coalition's efforts.



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Source of Conflict: Vague Mission and Vision, Unclear Strategies, and Unsatisfactory Results

- Organizational members and community members do not understand the coalition's mission and vision.
- Individual and organizational members question the coalition's mission and vision.
- Members frequently debate the activities, intended results, and strategies.
- Efforts yield unclear and/or unsatisfactory results.

Suggested Solutions: Clarify the Vision and Mission and Review Strategies and Intended Results

- Review vision, mission, goals, objectives, and activities. Ensure that they work together toward a cohesive end.
- Review intended outcomes for specificity and attainability.
- Set realistic goals and short- and long-term objectives. Ensure that activities, objectives, and goals are achievable.

Source of Conflict: Pressure to Complete Projects without Adequate Time and Funds

- Member organizations pressure the coalition for quick action.
- People in the community expect quick results.
- Media asks what the coalition is accomplishing.

Suggested Solutions: Educate Everyone about the Need for Adequate Time and Money to Achieve Desired Results

- Educate everyone about the need for adequate time and money. Affirm process and planning.
- Keep the coalition focused on planning and on working in an orderly way to accomplish *real results* over time. Projects may collapse or fail if they lack careful planning prior to implementation.
- Frequently affirm that coalition projects will not, at first, save money or time.
- Affirm often that the coalition will take longer to get up and running than most members would like.
- Affirm often that the coalition aims at long-term outcomes (reductions in adolescent pregnancy rates) and that this requires time, money, efforts, and most of all, persistence.

Source: Winer M, Ray K. *Collaboration Handbook*, St. Paul: Wilder Foundation, 1994