

MOUNTAIN STRONG

WHY COMMUNITY COALITIONS?

Why community coalitions? Throughout the United States, community coalitions make a significant difference. Local coalitions continue to change the way that American communities respond to the threats of illegal drugs, alcohol abuse and tobacco use. By mobilizing the entire community—parents, teachers, youth, police, health care providers, faith communities, business and civic leaders and others—communities can transform themselves.

(CADCA)

WHAT IS A COALITION?

In simplest terms, a coalition is a group of individuals and/or organizations with a common interest who agree to work together toward a common goal. That goal could be as narrow as obtaining funding for a specific intervention, or as broad as trying to improve permanently the overall quality of life for most people in the community. By the same token, the individuals and organizations involved might be drawn from a narrow area of interest, or might include representatives of nearly every segment of the community, depending upon the breadth of the issue.

Coalitions may be loose associations in which members work for a short time to achieve a specific goal, and then disband. They may also become organizations in themselves, with governing bodies, particular community responsibilities, funding, and permanence. They may draw from a community, a region, a state, or even the nation as a whole (the National Coalition to Ban Handguns, for instance). Regardless of their size and structure, they exist to create and/or support efforts to reach a particular set of goals.

Coalition goals are as varied as coalitions themselves, but often contain elements of one or more of the following:

- *Influencing or developing public policy, usually around a specific issue.*
- *Changing people's behavior (reducing smoking or drug use, for instance).*

Building a healthy community. This term generally refers both to the community's physical health (which may include not only medical and preventive or wellness services, but the environment, community planning, housing, hunger, substance abuse, and other factors) and its social and psychological health (encompassing diversity, education, culture and the arts, violence prevention, youth development, employment, economic development, mental health and other human services, etc.).

(Community Tool Box)

WHAT IS A MULTISECTOR TASK FORCE OR ACTION COMMITTEE?

A **task force or action committee** (also sometimes called an **ad hoc** committee from the Latin meaning "for this purpose") is a group assembled to address a specific problem or accomplish a specific goal. That problem or goal can take at least two different forms:

- It might be related to dealing with a specific community issue - affordable housing, child abuse, early detection and treatment of breast cancer.
- It might stem from a need of the larger group. A coalition might need a smaller group to focus on advocacy, for instance, or to draft a set of bylaws.
- A *multisector* task force or action committee is drawn from all sectors of the community affected by or involved in the problem or goal that is the group's focus. In the Peterson Community example, for instance, the task force leaders tried to include representatives of every group they could think of that had anything

to do with the problem of teen prescription drug abuse.

- Task forces and action committees, as you might assume from their names, are action-oriented. Their specific purpose is to do something. Depending upon the issue they address, their initial goals may be very specific (find community shelter space for at least 15 homeless families; draft a timeline for a community economic development effort) or more general (address the problem of youth violence). In either case, however, their purpose is to come up with real results.
- In general, these groups are not meant to be permanent. They either disband when their task is done, or they become another kind of group. As will be discussed in more detail later, a task force might spin off a new community intervention, for instance. While that venture would continue the work of the task force, it might not involve any of the first group's members, and would have a different purpose and structure.

A task force or action committee is usually part of a larger initiative - a community coalition of some sort, a local or other government committee, etc. It may be one of several such groups spawned by the initiative, each aimed at a different issue or goal. It may operate independently, or may have to gain approval from the larger group before taking any action.