

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

COMMUNITY ANTI-DRUG
COALITIONS AS
CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE

A Report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation from Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America

Written by
Theresa M. Ellis
& Sarah J.
Lenczner

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Theresa M. Ellis and Sarah J. Lenczner

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide analytic insight into the organization, operation, sustainability, and impact of community anti-drug coalitions across the country. In order to meet this goal, the study was designed in two parts: in-depth case studies of eight highly effective community coalitions and a cross-case analysis that examines characteristics shared among these eight coalitions. Both the analyses in the individual case studies and the cross-case analysis offer observations about how each coalition's history, understanding of its community, organization, leadership, and financial resources affect its outcomes and daily functioning.

A consistent set of distinguishing features was examined across all of the coalitions. These features were studied and described in the context of each coalition's own approach to community organizing around substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment. Throughout the review and analyses, the study will address certain programmatic characteristics that research suggests are especially important in creating an effective coalition. These characteristics include (1) outcomes, (2) planning, (3) sustained leadership, (4) institutionalization, and (5) diversification of funding sources. Specifically, the following research questions guided the collection of data and, subsequently, the production of this document:

- What notable outcomes have resulted from the coalition's efforts?
- How does the coalition ensure that its work matches the community's needs? What impact does the community's context have on the coalition?
- What are the organizational issues that govern each coalition's operation? What is the nature of governance structures? What was or is the process for building an infrastructure?
- What is the impact of leadership on coalitions? How does the organization recruit and support its leaders?
- How does the coalition obtain resources — including financial, human, structural, and societal — to sustain its work?
- How does the coalition create a collaborative, multi-sector initiative? What are the challenges of this work and what are the benefits? Who participates in these efforts?
- How does the coalition hold itself accountable for its work?

What Exactly is a Coalition?

Definitions of coalitions abound; however, there are two that speak particularly well to the essence of coalitions. The first definition is “an organization of individuals representing diverse organizations, factions, or constituencies who agree to work together in order to achieve a common goal.”¹ The second definition has a different understanding of who comprises coalitions: “an organization of diverse interest groups that combine their human and material resources to effect a specific change the members are unable to bring about independently.”² Although the membership — and subsequently the operational structure — in these definitions differ, they

Mary Ann Solberg, Executive Director of the Troy Community Coalition, captures the essence of a coalition in her catch phrase, “multiple strategies across multiple sectors.”

speak to the same concept, and convey the purpose of coalitions. Mary Ann Solberg, Executive Director of the Troy Community Coalition, captures the essence of a coalition in her catch phrase, “multiple strategies

across multiple sectors.” Coalitions bring disparate individuals or organizations together to reach a coalition-defined, shared goal.

Coalition Participants in this Study

This study looks at eight highly effective community anti-drug coalitions. (A complete list including point of contact and address for these coalitions can be found in Appendix A.) The eight coalitions in the study are:

- *The Boston Coalition* (Boston, Massachusetts)
- *The Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment* (Los Angeles, California)
- *The Miami Coalition for a Safe and Drug-Free Community* (Miami, Florida)
- *The Nashville Prevention Partnership* (Nashville, Tennessee)
- *Bering Strait Community Partnership* (Nome, Alaska)
- *Regional Drug Initiative* (Portland, Oregon)
- *San Antonio Fighting Back* (San Antonio, Texas)
- *Troy Community Coalition for the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* (Troy, Michigan)

¹ Feighery, E. and T. Rogers. 1989. *Building and maintaining effective coalitions*. How-to Guides on Community Health Promotion no. 12. Palo Alto: Stanford Health Promotion Resource Center.

² Brown, C. 1984. *The art of coalition building: A guide for community leaders*. New York: American Jewish Committee.

Selection Process

The eight coalitions were selected for this study because of their successes and demonstrable outcomes. The process began by soliciting recommendations for the study from a range of individuals. After a list was compiled, each coalition was contacted to provide key data about the coalition itself including: outcomes resulting from the coalitions' efforts; date of coalition's inception; size of the community served; location; racial and ethnic composition; and sources of funding. After identifying a group of coalitions with demonstrable and measurable outcomes, eight coalitions were chosen. As a group, they are diverse in geography, size, and demographics of the communities served, type of community (urban, suburban and rural), and funding sources.

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Organizations

Although there are countless organizations that address substance abuse issues, there are several organizations that are consistently mentioned in this study. The authors recognize that this list is not exhaustive, but include it as a point of reference for readers.

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) — CSAP provides national leadership in the effort to prevent alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug problems. CSAP develops materials, conducts studies, provides information, and offers technical assistance to help individuals and organizations prevent substance abuse. For more information, visit www.samhsa.gov/csap/.

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) — This national membership organization works to create and strengthen the capacity of new and existing coalitions to build safe, healthy, and drug-free communities. For more information, visit www.cadca.org.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) — Located in the Department of Justice, OJJDP provides national leadership on issues of juvenile delinquency and juvenile justice. For more information, visit www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.

Join Together — A project of the Boston University School of Public Health, this organization is a national resource for communities working to reduce substance abuse and gun violence. For more information, visit www.jointogether.org.

Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) — The principal purpose of ONDCP is to establish policies, priorities, and objectives for the nation's drug control program. Its goals are to reduce illicit drug use, manufacturing, and trafficking; drug-related crime and violence; and drug-related health consequences. For more information, visit www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov.

A Job Well Done

Like many other coalitions throughout the country, the eight coalitions featured in this study had and continue to have many successes. There are an estimated 5,000 community anti-drug coalitions in the United States, all working towards the goal of reducing substance abuse. The eight coalitions discussed in this study are among the most established, representing the many positive ways in which all coalitions can influence their communities.

Coalition successes occur in many spheres — some are process-oriented and some outcome-oriented, some well documented and some with anecdotal information

provided by members of the community. Coalitions recognize the need for increased documentation of both processes and outcomes, as this will help them refine their work, prove their efficacy

With help from a variety of community partners, the Partnership staff and youth members created the Java Hut, a substance-free coffeehouse designed for youth.

to organizations that provide resources to coalitions, and aid other coalitions that wish to reproduce their successes.

The successes of the eight coalitions studied are numerous and varied. They include the following projects as summarized below and discussed in greater detail in the site-specific case studies, which are available on-line at www.aecf.org or at www.cadca.org.

- The Boston Coalition brought college and university presidents together to create the Cooperative Agreement on Underage Drinking. This agreement represents the first coordinated effort of Boston's many institutions of higher education to address issues such as binge drinking, underage drinking, and changing the norms surrounding alcohol abuse that exist on college and university campuses.
- After the civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1992, the Los Angeles Community Coalition prevented the rebuilding of approximately 150 liquor stores. The Coalition also supported the development of 44 non-alcohol-related businesses, which now exist on the lots vacated by the aforementioned liquor stores. The project not only empowered the community members who promoted and enforced this change but also decreased crime in the area of the liquor stores by 16 percent.
- The Miami Coalition used a three-part strategy to decrease the percentage of high school seniors who reported using marijuana at least once during the most recent thirty-day period. The development of a media strategy, the creation of a network of prevention agencies, and discussions with high school students about the

dangers of marijuana all contributed to a decrease in the percentage of seniors who reported using marijuana from over 22 percent in 1995 to 9 percent in 1997. This finding is particularly noteworthy because the Miami Coalition was able to achieve these results while the national rates were increasing.

- The Nashville Prevention Partnership worked with elementary and middle school children in an attempt to influence them toward positive life goals and discourage them from using substances. The Partnership targeted an area in East Nashville and created after school programs, mentoring opportunities, attendance initiatives, and safe passages to and from school. Attendance and test scores increased as a result of the program.
- At a youth-led town meeting sponsored by the Bering Strait Community Partnership in Nome, Alaska, youth identified a need for a safe, substance-free space. With help from a variety of community partners, the Partnership staff and youth members created the Java Hut, a substance-free coffeehouse designed for youth. The Java Hut is helping to change norms in the community by providing a fun, youth-friendly atmosphere and activities that are not centered around alcohol or marijuana.
- Portland's Regional Drug Initiative (RDI) has promoted the establishment of drug-free workplaces among the city's large and small employers. Over 3,000 employers have attended an RDI training session, and of those, 92 percent have instituted drug-free workplace policies. As a result, there has been a 5.5 percent decrease in positive workplace drug tests.
- San Antonio Fighting Back worked to increase the age at which youth first used illegal substances. Research suggests that the later the age of first use, the lower the risk that a young person will become a regular substance abuser. Fighting Back staff and community members drafted a plan that included four strategies: influence youth's attitudes about drugs through the media; build self-esteem and drug resistance skills in youth and reinforce those skills through a mentoring relationship; provide safe places for youth after school; and create a healthy, educational forum for youth during the summer. As a result, the age of first illegal drug use increased from 9.4 years in 1992 to 13.5 years in 1997.
- In 1990, multiple data sources confirmed a trend of increased alcohol use by teenagers in the Troy community. Using its "multiple strategies over multiple sectors" approach, the Troy Coalition worked with parents, physicians, students, coaches, and others to address this problem from several angles. The results were significant: the rate of twelfth grade students who had consumed alcohol in the

past month decreased from 62.1 percent to 53.3 percent between 1991 and 1998, and the rate of eighth grade students decreased from 26.3 percent to 17.4 percent. The Troy Coalition believes that this decline represents not only a change in behavior on the part of students, but also a change in the norms of the community.

If the ultimate standard to which coalitions are held is their ability to improve their communities, then it is clear that these coalitions have succeeded. As funding becomes available for coalitions to document their work, the proof of their effectiveness will become even more well-known. Coalitions have the power not only to improve local conditions but also to empower residents and create a sense of community pride.

A Plethora of Partners

Forging partnerships with a range of community organizations is critical to the success of community coalitions. Broad-based representation on community coalitions ensures that all community organizations interested in working toward the coalition's goals have the opportunity to bring their perspectives to the coalition's work, and that the community feels it has ownership of coalition initiatives. It is common for community coalitions to work with representatives from the faith community, schools, the medical community, substance abuse treatment providers, businesses, public housing departments, youth-serving agencies, and local and state elected officials. In fact, many coalitions have formed non-traditional partnerships to address specific issues. For example, Regional Drug Initiative created a partnership with union leaders in order to reach an even greater number of Multnomah County employers and employees with its drug-free workplace message.

While the expectations for community partners varies significantly, all coalitions agreed that the most successful partnerships result when the coalition and the partner organization each acknowledge the other's goal and strive to achieve it. In this model, the coalition "wins" by having the partner participate, and the partner organization "wins" by realizing its goals. According to Mary Ann Solberg of the Troy Coalition, "this is a two-way street. We all win!"

Giving Away the Glory

All eight coalitions direct recognition and appreciation toward their partners rather than themselves, sometimes to the point where the community at large does not realize that the coalitions are even involved in a particular effort. This characteristic of coalitions has both beneficial and undermining effects.

On one hand, partners respond well to such attention, which ultimately advances the coalition's own agenda. For example, increased coalition self-promotion can lead to greater media coverage, which in turn can influence organizations and individuals to become involved with the coalition. With limited resources, however, some coalitions prefer to concentrate on public awareness of substance abuse, rather than public awareness of the coalition per se. "I don't think [RDI] is highly visible," says Marilyn Richen of the Portland coalition, "[but] my own preference is for the issue to be visible rather than having the organization be visible."

On the other hand, when a coalition gives credit away to its partners, recognition of the coalition and its mission can suffer, thus decreasing attention to coalition work in general. Several coalitions mentioned programs that they had created, but that had since been adopted by other agencies. Although this type of "adoption" is the ultimate goal of many coalition programs, the coalitions found that the general public often forgot that the coalition had been involved at all. There is continual tension between passing credit along to partners and retaining it to promote the coalition itself.

Taking the Lead

Six of the eight coalitions in the study worked under the aegis of a lead agency. Lead agencies helped the coalitions by taking many of the more mundane and time-consuming, albeit necessary, business activities out of the coalitions' hands. Lead agencies included a local United Way chapter, a community center, and the University of Miami. Typically, lead agencies assumed responsibility for managing payroll, benefits, facilities management, and some professional development.

Although the arrangements varied widely from coalition to coalition, the benefits of having lead agencies were often similar. The time that coalition staff members spent dealing with the logistical details of running an organization took away from the time they spent on affecting change in their communities. Any logistical details that can be passed along to a lead agency free staff time for program development, advocacy activities, and community organizing. Although there is the potential for coalitions to feel constrained by their lead agencies, these issues were typically avoided by constant and clear communication between the coalition and the lead agency.

The Rules of the Game

Each coalition was able to identify a series of formal rules and regulations by which it ostensibly operates. Although decisions such as apportioning funds, prioritizing efforts, and choosing new Board members are all technically governed by voting procedures, nominating committees, and other such regulations were almost always made by consensus. In most cases, the “official” coalition rules were familiar to the Executive Director and the Chair of the Board of Trustees but were unfamiliar to other members of the organization, including staff members and volunteers. This lack of knowledge had virtually no impact on the organizations since the official bylaws and regulations of the organizations were, for the most part, ignored. Discussion and consensus have taken over as the primary modes of decision-making among coalition leaders. “Over the years, consensus has become our mode of operation,” says Mary Ann Solberg of the Troy Coalition.

One of the factors that may lead to the adoption of these informal policies is the importance of buy-in from all of the parties involved in coalition decisions. Most Executive Directors, Boards of Trustees, and staff members believe that coalition members can benefit from a given activity or effort; therefore, they see no reason to coerce anyone into half-heartedly supporting a decision that they see as less than ideal. If one person is not convinced, then the coalition leadership must work to demonstrate that the proposed activity will improve the situation for everyone involved. Mary Ann Solberg elaborates, “The Coalition believes that everybody should win.”

Be Finicky About Funding

Executive Directors and financial directors emphasized how critical it is for coalitions to seek primarily, if not exclusively, funds that relate to the coalition's mission. The ongoing difficulty for non-profit organizations to fund their organizations can create a dilemma for coalitions striving to balance commitment to their mission with the practical necessities of the organization.

Executive Directors warned of the troubles that frequently ensue when a coalition accepts funds that divert the organization from its mission. For example, other substance abuse agencies that provide services might feel like the coalition is competing with them for scarce resources. Furthermore, the coalition might find itself in the uncomfortable position of providing services that it never intended to provide. Finally, the coalition might allow the search for available funds to drive the organization, rather than letting the organization's mission drive fundraising. Beverly Watts-Davis summed it up well when she commented, "We seek primarily private dollars that allow us to do what we think is important and ensures that we're not competing against any organizations with which we collaborate."

All of that said, there are a scarce number of organizations that are willing to fund substance abuse prevention coalitions. The Executive Directors in this study commented that organizations that fund coalitions struggle to understand the essence of coalitions. They believe that the difficulty stems from the fact that coalitions support structures and connections, not specific projects. Marilyn Wagner Culp, Executive Director of the Miami Coalition, explains, "When you fund a coalition, you fund an infrastructure, and that can be a hard sell." The burden is on coalitions to educate potential funding sources about how they work, why the coalition model is particularly effective for creating community change, and what outcomes have resulted from their efforts.

Marilyn Wagner Culp, Executive Director of the Miami Coalition, explains, "When you fund a coalition, you fund an infrastructure, and that can be a hard sell."

More than Money Matters

Although a certain level of funding is essential for coalitions, money is not the ultimate indicator of a coalition's success. Coalition members gave repeated examples of instances in which coalitions made decisions based on the strength of their convictions and then found funding sources to help them reach their goals.

For example, several of the coalitions formed before they had any financial support at all. This was the case in Los Angeles, Troy, and Portland. The critical nature

of the substance abuse problem in these communities demanded immediate attention and provided the rationale for establishing these coalitions. The people who initiated these coalitions also had a

broad understanding of their communities and of the human resources that could be mobilized to address the problem and create change, with little financial capital.

In another example, the Troy Coalition made the decision to hire a Youth Director at a time when they anticipated funding for such a position. When they were told that the funding no longer existed, coalition members decided to go ahead and hire a Youth Director regardless. They believed that the position was so critical to the community, that once a Youth Director was hired, the community would realize the significance of the position and find the funding to support it. Mary Ann Solberg credits her visionary Board of Trustees with giving her the support to make such critical decisions. "Hire them and the money will come. This Board believes that you have to go out on a limb to do good things," she says.

These eight coalitions have demonstrated that more than money determines their success. A combination of strong leadership, an articulated and inspiring vision, and the commitment of the community are critical to the organization's success. When these elements are present, the infusion of financial resources allows the coalition to blossom and realize its full potential.

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The Quantification Quandary

Although all of the coalitions in this study realize the importance of collecting outcomes data to quantify their achievements, the extent to which each is engaged in this effort varies significantly. Some coalitions are very sophisticated producers and consumers of data; some understand the value of data but have not incorporated it fully into their efforts; and others are just beginning their efforts to become data-driven.

There are two primary reasons why coalitions have struggled to collect quantifiable data. First, becoming a savvy collector and consumer of data requires substantial resources, sometimes in excess of a young coalition's budget. The coalitions that have the most sophisticated data analysis in place have either partnered with an outside organization or have hired a staff person whose sole responsibility is data collection and management. Both of these activities are expensive and well beyond smaller coalitions' means.

The second challenge results from coalitions' purpose of being a service broker rather than service provider. Because, for the most part, coalitions implement programs targeted for an entire community and rarely a specific population that can be pre- and post-tested, they wrestle with attributing changes to their efforts versus other efforts in the community. Jeniffer Richardson, Deputy Director of San Antonio Fighting Back, commented, "It's hard to know what Fighting Back has been specifically responsible for compared to the impact of some other group. How do you know for sure that your efforts [resulted in the noted change]?"

As coalitions increase their capacity to quantify their results and measure their contributions to others' work, the general public as well as funding sources will have a better understanding of coalitions and their success.

The Next Generation

Each of the eight coalitions works with young people and most have organized youth groups. Young people are pulled to the coalitions mostly through word of mouth and invitation by their peers. They are often driven by a strong commitment to their community, as well as the perks (dances, trips, discounts at local businesses) that the coalitions provide.

The coalitions see their youth efforts as critical to their mission in many ways:

- They train the next generation of leaders in the fight to reduce substance abuse and violence. In Los Angeles, for example, young people are trained in community organizing, activism, media relations, and strategic planning. They are expected to carry the work of the coalition into the next generation.
- They reach people when they are young in an effort to change community norms about drinking and drugs. The Boston Coalition works with students in elementary school in order to promote literacy and positive community values, which in turn helps prevent substance abuse.
- They provide a fun, educational, and drug-free environment for young people, which otherwise might be unavailable. The Troy Youth Coalition plans dances, Friday night parties at a local water park, and outings that provide young people with positive evening and weekend options.
- They provide a youth perspective on programs and policies of the coalition. Regional Drug Initiative Youth Coalition members present their perspective on the coalition's work at Task Force (Board) meetings.
- They use "positive peer pressure" in order to influence young people to stay drug free. Drug-Free Youth In Town (D-FY-IT), a program initiated by the Miami Coalition and now under separate leadership, uses a support group model to encourage members to maintain healthy lifestyles.

Each coalition has found a unique way to work with young people. "If you think you can do it in one generation, you've lost," says Harry Douglas, Board Chair of the Los Angeles Coalition, "It's an inter-generational activity."

Defined by the Community's Needs

Different communities vary markedly, as do the causes and expressions of substance abuse problems in these communities. Similarly, efforts to prevent substance abuse involve an array of activities, including modeling healthy behavior, providing drug-free spaces for youth, and changing community norms to create a culture that does not facilitate or endorse substance abuse. As coalitions have identified the factors that are contributing to substance abuse in their communities, they have diverged from traditional prevention activities to include other alternate strategies. These strategies have been very successful. Examples of the ways in which coalitions have diverged from traditional prevention programs include:

- San Antonio Fighting Back responds to residents whose basic needs are unmet by providing services and acting as a “shadow government.” In its first four years, these basic needs included access to employment in the coalition’s target area, affordable child care, and substance abuse treatment services for residents in the neighborhood. Now the coalition addresses other substance abuse-specific issues.
- The Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment in South Central Los Angeles organizes citizens in its neighborhoods to reclaim the community by understanding their rights and taking their demands to city hall. The Community Coalition also organizes neighbors around issues as diverse as livable wage jobs, welfare rights, access to affordable childcare, and quality products in local retail stores.
- The Bering Strait Community Partnership operates the Java Hut, a substance-free coffeehouse for youth. Prior to this effort, young people in Nome had no place to “hang out” that was drug free.
- The Troy Community Coalition for the Prevention of Drug and Alcohol Abuse in Troy, Michigan hosts an annual drug-free celebrity dinner as a way to model alcohol-free, fun events for young people.

Just as communities vary markedly from one to another, so do the causes and expressions of substance abuse problems in these communities.

The coalitions featured in the study recognize that a number of issues, such as economic development and lack of infrastructure, impact rates of substance use and abuse. Listening to the community members' perceptions of the problem; identifying human, financial and in-kind resources available to address the problem; and developing a work plan based on this data was critical to the success of the eight coalitions. Marsha Maorelli, Project Director of the Bering Strait Community Partnership, explained that the Partnership adopted a model from Youth-to-Youth that "includes more than just traditional prevention programs." This decision was critical because "so many of [the Partnership's] kids are at-risk...that they needed the additional support and the personal growth that [this model] provides." By taking its guidance from the community, these coalitions garner community-wide support for their projects and increase involvement from a wide spectrum of community organizations. Therefore all voices are represented in the coalition's plan, which in turn increases the likelihood that the coalition's agenda and the community's needs will be met.

A Passion for the Coalition Business

The Executive Directors whom we interviewed all shared the philosophy that coalitions are the best way in which to address community problems such as substance abuse. "We truly believe that these community coalitions should happen everywhere," says Marilyn Wagner Culp, Executive Director of the Miami Coalition. By bringing multiple sectors of the community together to identify and ultimately solve a problem, the coalition creates a solution that is supported by the whole community. It is because of their deeply held beliefs in coalitions that the eight Executive Directors are all willing to serve as mentors to others in the field. They take time and financial support away from their personal coalition efforts in order to help others develop successful community coalitions.

All eight of the coalitions in this study said that they are willing to mentor other coalitions, and five of them — Los Angeles, Miami, Portland, San Antonio, and Troy — already do extensive mentoring. Executive Directors state that mentoring other coalitions allows them to "avoid the mistakes that I made," says Marilyn

Wagner Culp. Carol Stone, Executive Director of Regional Drug Initiative, adds that by mentoring other coalitions, RDI's staff often learns "a thing or two in the process." Despite the challenges that result from mentoring other coalitions, such as the amount of time and financial support that coalitions dedicate to mentoring relationships, the Executive Directors all agree that it is a necessary and worthwhile endeavor. In the words of Mary Ann Solberg, Executive Director of the Troy Coalition, "I truly, truly believe that coalitions work."

Legendary Leaders

The Executive Directors of the eight coalitions shared certain characteristics. For example, they have been in the Executive Director position for a sustained period of time, and their leadership is viewed as critical by the coalitions' members. Of the eight Executive Directors, five have been with the organization for its entire history.

Although many of the leaders echo Mary Ann Solberg's notion that "anybody is replaceable," that sentiment was not shared by the members of the coalitions. Most coalition constituents consider the Executive Directors absolutely indispensable to the organization. Judge Dennis Drury's comment below represents the general consensus regarding the importance of the Executive Directors: "If Mary Ann left tomorrow, I would have to ask how long the organization would survive." Edie McCoy, who works with the Bering Strait Community Partnership, pointed to Marsha Maroelli, the Partnership's Project Director, as a leader because "[She] is interested in real outcomes rather than being political." Clearly, these leaders have a track record of accomplishment.

Maintaining a complete picture of the coalition's programs, contacts, successes, and history is another important accomplishment of the Executive Directors of the eight coalitions in the study. Many important pieces of information are never recorded or distributed, except as they pertain to a specific situation, program, or issue. Other information — ranging from the interests of new community members, a detailed history of the coalition's previous efforts, and information gained from casual conversations with Board members — exists only in the Executive

Directors' memories. "If I got hit by a truck tonight," says Pam White of the Nashville Prevention Partnership, "nobody would know this information. I don't know how to put [all of the information] in a reporting format."

Very few coalitions think about the succession of Executive Directors, or the results of their current Executive Director leaving the position. The Los Angeles Community Coalition was the only organization that created a "second tier of leadership," with the goal of a smooth transition following future or unexpected staff turnover. Although the other Executive Directors had given thought to their eventual departure from their respective institutions, none of them reported plans to leave immediately and thus have not formalized a plan for their departures.

After the Crisis — A New Climate for Coalitions

All of the coalitions in this study were formed in order to address the growing problem of substance abuse in their community, and four coalitions arose as a direct response to what individuals in those communities termed a "crisis" situation, specifically the crack epidemic during the 1980s. The crises despite the coalitions' efforts, have not subsided. Substance abuse continues to be an issue, but because the immediate crisis is over, the public's perception of the problem has changed dramatically.

As a result, coalitions are faced with the quandary of how to continue to draw people's attention to the issue of substance abuse when the public's perception has changed radically and when the statistics show that youth rates of substance abuse are declining after years of steady increases. Coalitions want rates of substance abuse to continue to decrease in their communities. The question remains, however, how do coalitions draw attention to their work when the crisis has passed? As Brad Bauler, consultant to The Boston Coalition, says, "What is the role of a coalition when the drug and substance abuse issue is number eight on people's minds? It is the coalition's goal to move the issue [to that point], but how do you engage people once the issue gets to that point?"

All of the coalitions in this study have adapted to this changed climate. What follows are some examples of coalitions' creative efforts to keep the community engaged despite the decline of public interest in the problem.

- The Boston Coalition spent time during fiscal year 1999 rethinking its visions and its role in the community. The coalition is still in the process of formalizing its plans. One of its most promising programs is a tutoring effort in a traditionally underprivileged elementary school. The tutoring program was founded on the coalition's belief that giving young students the academic skills they need to succeed in school also gives them the self-confidence they need to resist the peer pressure to use alcohol and drugs.
- In Los Angeles, the coalition has turned its attention from the crack epidemic of the 1980s to organizing its community "from the bottom up." During the summer of 1999, the coalition launched a neighborhood membership drive to recruit residents from the neighborhood to join the coalition and, more importantly, to further empower the community to reclaim the neighborhood.
- During the spring of 1999, the Miami Coalition launched a new initiative entitled Priority One, aiming to focus the public's attention specifically on youth rates of substance abuse. The plan includes specific action steps for raising the community's awareness of the current situation with youth substance abuse, involving the community in specific projects, and tracking and measuring Priority One's effect on rates of use.

Substance abuse continues to be an issue, but because the immediate crisis is over, the public's perception of the problem has changed dramatically.

Elements of Successful Coalitions

Although each successful coalition is constituted differently, the following elements were shared by the eight coalitions in this study.

Mission Statement

The mission statement clarifies coalition goals to members, as well as the larger community, potential partners, and funding sources.

Understanding of Community

An in-depth understanding of the community, its assets and its needs, is of critical importance to coalitions. A needs assessment can be valuable in the endeavor, as can the personal knowledge of longtime community members.

Strategic Planning

Often created at a retreat, and often including the perspective of many constituencies, the strategic plan charts a course for the coalition over a given time period. Frequently, the process of bringing a diverse group of partners together to map out the coalition's direction is as valuable as the plan itself.

Purposeful Decisions

Coalitions should be able to clearly articulate their rationale for being involved in service brokering, service provision, and/or advocacy.

Organizational Structure

Coalitions benefit from a defined organization structure that is understood by all staff members and volunteers. A lead agency, which takes responsibility for some of the coalition's administrative tasks, can ease some of the organizational burden on the coalition itself.

Diversified and Relevant Funding

In order to truly sustain and advance the coalition, funding must be mission-specific and appropriate to coalition goals. It is also important to have diversified funding, which guards against unforeseen events and brings additional partners into the coalition process. Funding can include in-kind donations, as well as monetary grants.

Leadership

Strong, sustained leadership is critical to the success of a coalition to ensure that essential relationships have time to develop and grow with the organization.

Volunteers

Volunteers are critical to the success of a coalition. To attract and retain volunteers, they need to understand their value to the organization and to feel that they are part of a winning team.

Representative Membership and Staff

A coalition whose staff members and volunteers represent the diversity of its area will have greater success in involving, motivating, and empowering the community.

Diverse Partners

The greater the diversity among a coalition's partners, the greater its ability to think and act in creative and innovative ways.

Multiple Strategies Across Multiple Sectors

With support from a cadre of community sectors, coalitions use a variety of strategies — media campaigns, parent education campaigns, community advocacy projects — to meet their community's needs.

Clear Expectations

Staff members and volunteers respond positively to concrete expectations.

Access to Community Leaders

To effect change, it is helpful for coalitions to have access to community leaders and decision-makers.

Up-to-Date Technology

Coalitions can use technology to their benefit in many ways, including accessing current research, communicating with volunteers, training staff members, and identifying new sources of funding.

Communication

Coalitions must create avenues for communication with all of its constituents, including partners, volunteers, the local community, funding sources, local businesses, and civic leaders.

Professional Development Opportunities

Staff members, Board of Trustee members, and volunteers value and benefit from opportunities to expand their knowledge and establish contacts through professional development opportunities.

Evaluation

Evaluations, particularly those that contain measurable outcomes, are critical for two reasons: they enable the coalition to understand whether it should continue or redirect its efforts, and they convince funding sources of the value of coalitions. Outside evaluators often provide a useful neutral perspective to evaluations.

Where We Go from Here: Next Steps for Coalitions and Communities

The eight coalitions in this study consistently cited several factors that would facilitate and enhance their work in and for communities.

Coalitions urged increased public understanding of the coalition movement and its successes. Community anti-drug coalitions have succeeded, to varying degrees, in addressing the substance abuse problems in their communities. They all use various forms of media to communicate their efforts to their communities, but these organizations need help drawing national, state, and local attention to their efforts.

Organizations that provide funding for coalitions must have a better understanding of the philosophy and nature of coalitions. Executive Directors expressed frustration with their continual struggle to help funding sources conceptualize the benefits of coalitions. The case for coalitions as a worthwhile investment, while valid, can be difficult to explain because funding is frequently used to support infrastructure needs rather than specific programs.

The general public needs a better understanding of the factors that contribute to substance use and abuse. Poverty, lack of economic opportunity, lack of governmental infrastructure, and poor educational opportunities all contribute to growing rates of substance abuse. Many of the coalitions in this study are addressing these issues in order to impact the rates of substance abuse. A greater understanding of how these issues impact substance abuse will facilitate coalitions' efforts to effect change in their communities.

Coalition staff members pointed to a need for professional development that addresses coalition development in a sophisticated, professional manner. Several Executive Directors expressed disappointment that professional development activities for the substance abuse prevention field tend to be too “touchy feely.” Instead, coalition staff members would prefer professional development that is research-based and grounded in theory.

Coalitions called for the creation of additional treatment facilities. The majority of coalitions noted a severe need for additional treatment centers, especially for adolescents, women, and low-income and/or uninsured individuals. Several coalitions also called attention to the need for treatment facilities in the communities that the coalition serves, rather than across or out of town.

Coordinated evaluation would help the coalition movement advance its cause.

While most of the coalitions in this study are collecting outcome data, they do not use standard indicators because, to date, a national organization has not offered guidance on what kinds of data coalitions should collect. Moreover, many organizations that collect information on drug-related incidents do not collect the same data, and many are unwilling to share their data with outside organizations. Many coalitions monitor the same social changes, but without common data sets; therefore it is very difficult to make comparisons nationally, or from community to community. National leadership would help coalitions begin this process.

Conclusion

There is more than one way to build a successful coalition. Coalitions come in all shapes and sizes, define their mission in a variety of ways, and pay their bills with a variety of funding sources. Their origins, their leaders, and the communities they serve are equally diverse. They have all proven, however, that this diversity of attributes facilitates the success of the organizations. Without exception, all of the coalitions profiled in this study have experienced extraordinary success in their communities. And, also without exception, these coalitions realize that in order to sustain themselves in the twenty-first century they will have to continue to demonstrate similar success.

This document is an attempt to help community anti-drug coalitions across the country understand how these eight coalitions have made their way in the

world of substance abuse prevention, and what they have in common. The authors believe that this document and the case studies, in particular, provide communities with a way to connect with a coalition, read the coalition's story, and learn from its experiences.

Finally, as the coalition field adapts to a changing climate of substance abuse, the authors hope that those individuals in decision-making positions will adapt as well. The eight coalitions in this study made several strong, substantive recommendations to lead the field into the coming years. The authors hope that the readers of this document will understand these recommendations and, in some way, strive to make change for those whose lives are touched by substance abuse.

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Appendix A

The following is a list of contacts at the community coalitions that participated in this study:

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