

The Coalition Approach to Suicide Prevention

Suicide is a public health issue that necessitates a community-level response to address risk factors. Regional, county, and community coalitions foster this approach by engaging diverse individuals in prevention efforts. This collective voice helps raise awareness, distribute resources, and connect people to crisis and treatment services.

The Make-up of a Coalition

To develop and maintain an effective coalition, it's important to understand how coalitions create community-level change. A coalition brings together different interest groups in the pursuit of a goal they can't achieve separately.¹ Coalitions often combine their human, social, political, and financial capital to take advantage of opportunities for advocacy and fill gaps in resources and services. Coalitions are collaborative by nature, and this collaboration moves organizations from competing to consensus-building.¹

Coalition Membership

Coalition members represent a range of interests and various community sectors, including government agencies, nonprofit organizations, community members, and faith, civic, or business groups.^{1,2} Additionally, coalitions should strive to include local law enforcement, media representatives, suicide loss survivors, and individuals who have survived suicide attempts. It's important for coalition membership to reflect the diversity of the local community, ensuring that populations significantly affected by suicide are represented.

As part of the recruitment or onboarding process, take time to ask new members if they are comfortable representing a specific segment of the community. For example, someone with military experience may not wish to speak on behalf of veterans, and a survivor of a suicide attempt might not be comfortable disclosing that publicly.

Keys to a Coalition's Success

As a coalition develops, it should prioritize the following:^{4,5}

- A clear mission and purpose
- Committed stakeholders
- Achievable objectives and activities
- Formalized rules and procedures
- Effective work and decision-making structures
- Sufficient staff
- Frequent and ongoing training for staff and members
- Ownership of the coalition by its members and the community itself
- A high level of trust among the membership
- Develop and implement strategic and action plans
- Continuous evaluation of the coalition and its activities

Why a Coalition and Why Now?

The strength of coalition work lies in collaboration. Suicide impacts all communities and demographic groups. While various agencies may address this issue, their efforts can lack consistent messaging and visibility. By working together toward a shared goal and unified strategies, coalition members can enhance and support one another's initiatives.²

Before joining or forming a coalition, organizations should assess the benefits and potential challenges of membership. The benefits include:³

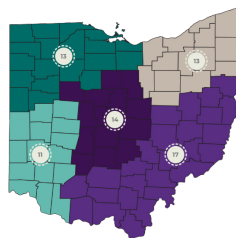
- **Increased credibility.** An organization can boost its credibility by working with recognized leaders and being part of a larger group. The collective voice of the coalition is more influential and is often taken more seriously than that of an individual member.
- **Maximized resources.** Coalitions can share costs, workloads, and resources, aiding organizations new to advocacy in engaging with public policy. Limited local resources for suicide prevention, including members' time, can be optimized by sharing, reducing waste and maximizing outreach.
- **Shared ideas.** Coalition members gain insights from innovative solutions and learn from one another. Diverse representation enhances community support for prevention efforts.

Coalition Success

A coalition succeeds when all members have a say in ongoing activities and decisions. The chair or organizing agency cannot be the sole voice or decision maker. Rather, to function properly, the coalition must be a combined effort.

Connect

Find the coalition near you with the OSPF Coalition Map at ohiospf.org/coalitions/.



References

- 1 Butterfoss FD, Minkler M. Ignite!: Getting your community coalition "fired up" for change. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse; 2013.
- 2 Community Tool Box. Section 5. Coalition Building I: Starting a Coalition. Community Tool Box. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/promotionstrategies/start-a-coalition/main>. Accessed December 2, 2024.
- 3 Raynor J. What makes an effective coalition? Evidence-based indicators of success. TCC Group. Published March 2011. <https://www.tccgrp.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/What-Makes-an-Effective-Coalition.pdf>. Accessed December 2, 2024.
- 4 Coalition Guide Resource. Society for Public Health Education. <https://dev.sophe.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Full-Resource-Guide.pdf>. Accessed December 2, 2024.
- 5 Forming a coalition. World Animal Net. <https://worldanimal.net/forming-a-coalition>. Accessed December 2, 2024.

ABOUT

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



(614) 429-1528 / [OhioSPF.org](https://ohiospf.org)

