

Leadership

Confucius said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Addressing issues related to physical activity at the community level can indeed be viewed as a long, exciting, and frequently challenging trek. Perhaps one of the most critical first steps in this journey is to identify and engage passionate, committed leaders. These few individuals will serve as catalysts to begin strategic planning, engage the community, recruit and develop a strong coalition, lead concerted public policy and advocacy efforts to create systems change in communities, and help assure sustainability of efforts.

It is important to have a strong leader at the start of a coalition. It is also key to identify and develop new leadership for the long haul and to ensure continuity of leadership, because a group without a leader easily stalls or becomes chaotic.

– *Maintaining Effective Community Coalitions*



There are two types of volunteer leaders that might be involved in community action: figurehead leaders and actively-engaged leaders.

Figurehead Leaders

A figurehead leader might be an individual, or individuals, who lend their name and image to efforts, but who might not provide much hands-on involvement. This type of individual might be recruited as an “Honorary Chairperson” of a coalition or partnership. These individuals are typically celebrities, professional sports figures, CEOs of major businesses, or high-ranking elected officials. Their positions and other time commitments often preclude them from becoming engaged significantly in ongoing activities, but they can bring several important resources to the table. These include:

- ◆ **The value of their name and image. The prominent status of some people is enough to attract others into a coalition or group. For example, an invitation to join a coalition that is extended from a renowned community leader might garner better results than an invitation from an agency staff person.**
- ◆ **Ability to facilitate networking opportunities and open doors to other resources that have value for the community initiative.**

- ◆ **Lending their name to a cause, and also provide resources through their organization in the form of direct financial or in-kind support (such as staff, office space, overhead, equipment, or meeting space).**
- ◆ **Serving as a spokesperson for your issue or cause. Their time might be used when you need presentations made to policy making groups such as city council, state legislatures, foundations, or the media.**

When identifying and recruiting figurehead leaders:

1. **Be realistic in your expectations.** Prominent individuals usually have extremely limited free time. They might appear at high-profile events such as kick-off meetings, ribbon cuttings, or awards functions. But generally they are not going to be available to take part in operational activities of your community effort, such as committee meetings.
2. **If you involve elected officials, be sensitive to partisan issues.** The best course is to recruit bipartisan leadership so you are appealing to a broad base of organizations and individuals. This is especially important if you, or your partner organizations, are not-for-profit 501(c)(3) agencies, government entities, or public education organizations that need to be sensitive to politicized issues.
3. **Be aware that celebrities sometimes come with baggage.** Having an “A-list” celebrity or professional sports figure as an honorary chair can be exciting and rewarding. But celebrities can become entangled in controversial issues. Professional sports figures can get traded. If you tie your community group or coalition to a high-profile individual and that individual becomes involved in negative publicity or moves from your community, there is the potential of a negative reflection on your efforts.

Actively Engaged Leaders

An actively engaged leader is someone who has demonstrated leadership capabilities, is committed to improvement in the community, and is willing to give their time to be actively involved in your efforts. Initially, you might identify a small number of these leaders to help your community initiative get off the ground. This type of leader is typically someone who is already engaged and passionate about your issue or cause. They might be an officer or senior staff member of an agency that shares common goals or missions with your community issues. Examples might include a prominent physician who has a high-profile involvement in physical activity; CEOs of health/wellness organizations or medical centers; business leaders; or individuals engaged in civic leadership.

You might think of your carefully selected leadership group as an Executive Committee. Their roles may transition as your coalition or group grows, though hopefully they will remain involved and assume roles such as subcommittee chairs.

As hands-on leaders, these individuals would initially be engaged in activities such as:

- ◆ **Agenda setting**
- ◆ **Helping identify and recruit coalition members**
- ◆ **High-level strategic planning**

- ◆ Facilitating meetings
- ◆ Identifying and securing resources (both financial and in-kind)
- ◆ Serving as a media spokesperson
- ◆ Building sustainability
- ◆ Making presentations to community and business groups

As you think about who to recruit as your key leaders, consider:

- ◆ “Who cares?” Who are the prominent people in your community who have a passionate concern about the health and well-being of your residents and are already engaged in similar issues/causes?
- ◆ Who is “angry” about poor health and the increased rates of obesity and physical inactivity?
- ◆ And perhaps most importantly, who are the people in your community who have a reputation of getting things done?

Many of the people you want to recruit as leaders for your community initiative might already be actively engaged in other issues. A community board member quoted in the publication **Coloring Outside the Box: One Size Does Not Fit All in Nonprofit Governance** said, “Like any sub-sector of the community, there is a group who are the people you call. That makes it a real challenge to get full engagement. They are overcommitted.”



Leadership Game Plan

The roles and expectations for community-based initiative leadership need to be clearly communicated to the people who are being asked to serve in this capacity. A formal method to do this would be to develop a “volunteer leadership job description” that outlines roles and expectations. If it is possible to outline the amount of time that will be requested, this can also be helpful. This helps your leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the role they will be taking on.

You likely need a number of individual leaders; each will have different leadership roles in your initiative. For example:

- ◆ In the initial stages, it is essential to have “ideas people.” These are the visionaries who are good at seeing possibilities and getting others excited.
- ◆ At the same time, you also want people who are action-oriented – the type of person who can bring a vision to life. You don’t want to spend your efforts completely in idea generation and planning, without actually making something happen to enhance your community.
- ◆ When working within a coalition, leaders will need to be able to share power and credit, facilitate the input of diverse groups, and engage and inspire multiple stakeholders.
- ◆ Similar to figurehead leaders, operational leaders can also bring resources to the table in the form of financial support, human capital (staff or volunteers), and in-kind support such as office space, networking, supplies, staff support, and meeting support.

Leadership Competencies

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management describes key leadership qualifications, called *Executive Core Qualifications*, that can be used to help identify and develop community coalition leaders.³

<p>Leading Change</p> <p>Ability to develop and implement an organizational vision that integrates key national and program goals, priorities, values, and other factors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision • External awareness • Creativity and innovation • Strategic thinking • Continuous learning • Flexibility • Service motivation 	<p>Leading People</p> <p>Ability to design and implement strategies that maximize employee potential and foster high ethical standards in meeting the organization’s vision, mission, and goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict management • Leveraging diversity • Team building • Integrity/honesty
<p>Business Acumen</p> <p>Ability to acquire and administer human, financial, material, and information resources in a manner that instills public trust and accomplishes the organization’s mission, and the ability to use new technology to enhance decision making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management • Human resources • Technology management 	<p>Results Driven</p> <p>Accountability and continuous improvement. Includes the ability to make timely and effective decisions and produce results through strategic planning and the implementation and evaluation of programs and policies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability • Problem solving • Decisiveness • Customer service • Entrepreneurship • Technical credibility
<p>Coalitions and Communication</p> <p>Ability to explain, advocate, and express facts and ideas in a convincing manner. To negotiate with individuals and groups internally and externally. The ability to develop professional networks with other organizations and to identify the internal and external politics that impact the work of the organization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral communication • Written communication • Influencing/negotiating • Partnering • Political savvy • Interpersonal skills 	

³ *Executive Core Qualifications*. U.S. Office of Personnel Management. <http://www.opm.gov/ses/recruitment/ecq.asp> (accessed 4/16/09)

Staff Leadership

Some community-based initiatives are fortunate to have staff allocated to the efforts. Staff might be individuals from a lead agency or organization whose time has been allocated specifically to the initiative, or a grant or other funding mechanism might enable an initiative to secure a staff person (or people). Staff who are involved in community-based initiatives at a leadership level usually require many of the competencies of volunteer leadership. In addition, they are likely to also have responsibilities such as:

- ◆ **Fiscal management**
- ◆ **Preparing reports and updates for funders and other key partners**
- ◆ **Assuring that plans are developed and appropriately monitored**
- ◆ **Assuring smooth operational functions of activities**
- ◆ **Assuring adequate communication with leadership and coalition members**
- ◆ **Assuring follow-up is conducted and keeping track of volunteer assignments**
- ◆ **Serving as the point-of-contact for media and policy makers**

Leadership Tools and Resources

Building a Healthier Chicago

(<http://healthierchicago.avenet.net/>). Building a Healthier Chicago is a collaborative of local and national stakeholders working to strengthen efforts to promote the health of Chicago residents and employees. This website offers resources on topics including nutrition and physical activity, blood pressure, school health and wellness, worksite wellness, health data and research findings, public health policy, and health in the news.

Coloring Outside the Box: One Size Does Not Fit All in Non-Profit Governance.

(<http://www.mapfor nonprofits.org/vertical/Sites/%7B876C4FB8-E997-480F-BF5B-AFAA0F113D9D%7D/uploads/%7B06FC1B58-B131-4A8A-8545-7E9D09388C38%7D.PDF>). This report presents findings and recommendations from leaders about ways to improve board functionality and effectiveness.

Eleven Cool Ideas for Finding Hot New Board Members

(http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/tools_you_can_use/11-01-07_find_new_board_members.cfm). These practical tips have been compiled by The Fieldstone Alliance, a 501(c)(3) agency that provides consulting, that help nonprofits, funders, networks, and communities achieve greater impact.

United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative Extensive System Offices

(<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/index.html>). Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of local or regional offices. These offices provide useful, practical, and research-based information on a variety of topics. Many state extension offices address community leadership issues.