

Strategic Planning for Coalitions

Background

This resource provides an overview of strategic planning for coalitions. It outlines processes for developing a shared vision, mission, goals, and objectives. It also provides an action planning template to help translate your coalition's goals and objectives into concrete steps and measure progress toward your mission.



Establishing a vision, mission, and goals for the coalition

Vision. Coalitions should begin by developing a shared vision statement (Box 1). This defines a future that your coalition hopes to create. It can help to first define the problem that your coalition is addressing and then describe what success would look like if that problem were solved. For example, the [Yolo County Nutrition Action Partnership](#) vision is that:

All Yolo County residents enjoy healthy foods, beverages, and physical activity every day

Mission. A mission statement describes how your coalition will achieve its vision by working toward specific outcomes. One way to develop a mission statement is to agree on what is important, such as working together, being open and transparent, or ensuring equity. For example, the mission of the [Nutrition Access LA](#) coalition is:

To ensure that people who are vulnerable in Los Angeles County have sufficient, nutritious, and affordable food through policy changes and organizational/institutional capacity building

Goals. These describe actions your coalition can take to achieve its mission. They define broad focus areas and guide the development of coalition work groups. Example goals from Merced County's [Nutrition Action Plan](#) coalition are to:

- *Promote the Farmers' Market*
- *Build and grow access to physical activities for Merced County residents*



Box 1. Understanding strengths and needs to inform planning

To shape a vision, mission, and goals, it is important to understand a community's strengths (or assets) and needs. Your coalition may do this by:

- Reviewing data sources on needs or assets, such as community needs assessments, health outcome data, and case studies.
- Determining whether your coalition needs to gather more data. You may use tools such as this [asset mapping guide](#), which shows how to map assets relevant to the community, such as businesses, educational organizations, community-based organizations, social supports, and safety and security resources.



Key consideration: Collaborate with community

By working with coalition members to develop a vision, mission, and goals, you will ensure their buy-in and commitment. Include people who live in the community in the decision-making process as well as those who have lived experience with the issue your coalition is trying to address. See the *Partnering with Communities in Coalition Work* resource for examples of involving coalition members and moving toward community ownership. Also see this [case study from the WeTHRIVE! initiative](#)¹ for an example of how Hamilton County Public Health shares power with the local community and schools.

¹ You must create a free account to access this resource.



Creating an action plan with specific objectives

An action plan breaks down goals into specific objectives and concrete steps. Start by writing objectives for each goal. Objectives should follow the SMARTIE criteria (below) so they are clear and easy to track. If your coalition is new or small, it should focus on a few practical objectives.

Specific	Identifies what your coalition will do
Measurable	Indicates how you will measure completion or success
Achievable	Focuses on something your members can achieve together
Relevant	Focuses on an issue that aligns with your coalition’s mission
Time-bound	States when the action will be completed
Integrating community perspectives	Engages diverse perspectives from communities most affected by the issue
Everyone benefits	Addresses barriers to participation and ensures fair access to resources and decision-making power

Adapted from Minnesota Department of Health. “[Objectives and Goals: Writing Meaningful Goals and SMART Objectives.](#)” July 2025.

Once you select your objectives, determine smaller action steps to achieve them. Consider what needs to be done, who will make sure it gets done, what resources are needed, when it will be done, and how you will know if it succeeded (see Table 1). Determine whether your current members can carry out your goals and objectives or whether you need to recruit additional members (see the *Building Coalition Membership* resource and the *Recruiting and Engaging Coalition Members* resource for more information).

Table 1. Coalition action planning: Template

Goal 1. Increase residents’ access to fresh vegetables in the Main Street neighborhood.						
Objective 1. Establish one community garden in the Main Street Park by June 2026.						
Action step	Responsible individual	Partners		Necessary resources	Timeline	Measuring success
What needs to be done? (List and number the action steps to achieve the objective)	Who will make sure it gets done? [Name coalition members]	Who can help? (Name partners to involve, if any)	How will we engage them? (List timing, frequency, and types of actions)	What resources do we need? (List resources needed to achieve step, and how to obtain them)	When does it need to be done? (Specify the deadline or date range)	How will we measure success? What data do we need to collect? (List measures and data)
1) Obtain approval for the community garden.	Coalition member A	Parks and Recreation Department	Attend quarterly meeting to propose community garden.	Presentation on how a community garden will benefit the neighborhood (developed by member A).	Outreach complete by February 2026. Attend March 2026 meeting.	Parks and Recreation expresses support for concept and approves plan.
Objective 2. Approach our city council about enacting a sugar-sweetened beverage tax by March 2026 to fund healthy food programming.						
Action step	Responsible individual	Partners		Necessary resources	Timeline	Measuring success
2) Come up with a pitch and examples of prior taxes to share with city council.	Coalition member B (policy lead)	a) Other cities who have enacted the tax b) ChangeLab Solutions	a) Meet with other cities to understand their approach b) Reach out to ChangeLab for technical assistance	Proposal for enacting a tax and plan for reaching out to city council members (developed by member B)	Proposal and plan drafted by January 2026; revised with coalition input by February 2026.	Reached out to city council members and have a meeting scheduled to discuss proposal.

Adapted from Mathematica. “Understanding and Planning for Sustainability: A Guide for Multi-Sector Community Partnerships Working to Address Social Determinants of Health.” 2023. https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Sustainability-Planning-Guide_2023-05-09-150857_gsgd.pdf.

Source

The content in this document was informed by the following resource:

- Butterfoss, F.D. *Ignite! Getting Your Community Coalition “Fired Up” for Change*. AuthorHouse, 2013.